FROM "BAT CAVES" TO "ALABASTER CAVERNS"

A HISTORY OF THE USE AND CONSERVATION

OF ALABASTER CAVERNS STATE PARK

By

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Abstract:

The history of the human use and exploration of Alabaster Caverns reflects the emergence of American environmentalism during the twentieth century. The progression of the management of Alabaster Caverns from exploitation and resource extraction to conservation, preservation, and education also mirrors the public's evolving beliefs, attitudes, and actions regarding environmentalism. The community's exploitation and extraction of natural resources in the caverns, and their attitudes of appreciation of the park, have often overlapped and sometimes worked against one another. Alabaster Cavern's story of human exploration, exploitation, and conservation emerged throughout the twentieth century and continued into the twenty-first along with the American environmentalism movement.

Alabaster Caverns' story predates the establishment of state parks in Oklahoma, with the first homesteaders arriving in the area as a result of the Land Run of 1893 that opened the Cherokee Outlet. During the early days of its exploration, the system of caves that make up the park were called the Bat Caves because of the large bat population that could be seen emerging from the caves each evening at sunset. Over the next three decades, area residents discovered that although the land above the caves proved unfit for farming, there were resources below the surface that they could extract for economic gain, including mining the caves for gypsum, bat guano, and alabaster. Throughout each transfer of ownership or lease agreement, the caves provided a local playground for area visitors seeking a day of adventure, ultimately leading to the acquisition of the property by the State of Oklahoma for the development of a state park. Over the past sixty years, the State of Oklahoma's management policies dictating the use and preservation of Alabaster Caverns have continued to evolve into a stewardship advocating conservation, preservation, and education.

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"IN THE FAMOUS CIMARRON COUNTRY"

Driving north on State Highway 50 from its junction with Highway 412 in northwestern Oklahoma, travelers see a rolling landscape dotted by cedar trees, brush, and lush green fields. In the distance, mesas mark the remnants of an ancient mountain range. The pavement rises and falls to accommodate the scenic terrain, rich in geological history, filled with hidden canyons, caves, and fossil fuels. A newspaper described the scene in 1928: "Throughout the region…the land is as wild and barren of improvements as any undiscovered country…. Most of the land is covered with grass on which cattle seem to thrive, but sage brush apparently is what the country was adapted to by nature."[1]

Little has changed the landscape in the last ninety-five years. Cattle still roam and the terrain is still covered with grass and sage brush, but now the advances of technology and infrastructure dot the landscape in the form of modern wind turbines, oil pump jacks, and tanks. To the east of Highway 50, dozens of white oil and natural gas tanks are scattered across the panorama. New drilling sites mar the scene with their hulking equipment rising into the sky and stripping the surrounding land of all

[1] "Little Girl Leads the Way Into Queer Bat Canyon Near Freedom," *The Oklahoman*, September 23, 1928, n.p.

vegetation. This is Oklahoma's energy tradition, oil and natural gas drawn from far beneath the surface of the earth.

A shift of perspective to the western horizon reveals irregular rows of slowly spinning turbines atop tall white columns towering above the prairie. The wind farm, and its collection of a clean, renewable resource, reflects the growing demand for alternatives to polluting forms of energy. The traveler's changing point of view from the oil tanks in the east to the wind turbines in the west symbolizes the public's transformation in attitude from consumption of natural resources to an appreciation for the natural beauty of the geography as well as a responsibility to protect the environment.

Located in the midst of this landscape lies Alabaster Caverns State Park.[2] The entrance of the main cavern is tucked in the side of Cedar Canyon. The park is located on two hundred acres in Sections 28 and 33 of Township 26 North, Range 18 West, five miles south of Freedom in Woodward County, Oklahoma.[3] Alabaster Caverns is one of the largest natural gypsum caves in the world, extending more than a half a mile underground with 6,146 feet of passage.[4]

The history of the human use and exploration of the caverns reflects the emergence of American environmentalism during the twentieth century. The progression of the management of Alabaster Caverns from exploitation and resource extraction to

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[2] See Appendix A for a map with the location of Alabaster Caverns in Oklahoma.

[3] J. Harlen Bretz, "A Solution Cave in Gypsum," *The Journal of Geology*, 60, (May 1952): 279; Arthur J. Myers, "Alabaster Caverns," *Oklahoma Geology Notes*, 20, (June 1960): 132. The exact coordinates are the southwest quarter of section 28 (160 acre tract) and the northwest section of the northwest section of section 33 (forty acre tract), both in Township 26 North; Range 18 West. See Appendix for map of the area. See Appendix B for a map of Township 26 North; Range 18 West.

[4] Arthur J. Myers et al., *Guide to Alabaster Cavern and Woodward County, Oklahoma*, Oklahoma Geological Survey Guide Book XV (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991), 5; Bruce Baker, "Alabaster Caverns State Park, Oklahoma," *National Speleological Society News* 46 (April 1988): 84.

conservation, preservation, and education also mirrors the public's evolving beliefs, attitudes, and actions regarding environmentalism. The community's exploitation and extraction of natural resources in the caverns, and their appreciation of the park, have often overlapped and sometimes worked against one another. Alabaster Cavern's story of human exploration, exploitation, and conservation emerged throughout the twentieth century and continued into the twenty-first with the American environmentalism movement.

Early conservationists and preservationists such as Gifford Pinchot and John Muir laid the foundations for environmentalism. Gifford, a leading proponent of conservation, fought for the creation of a national forest service because of his concern about logging practices and his belief that the industry needed to be regulated to protect forests as well as to maintain itself. He believed in conservation of resources that is the protection of resources so that they might serve the greatest good for the majority for the longest time possible.[5] John Muir believed in the preservation of North America's wilderness, protecting it from all human encroachment and development. Congress merged both of these philosophies in the management and promotion of national parks, when it passed the National Park Service Organic Act, establishing the National Park Service in 1916. Stephen Mather, the National Park Service's first director, understood that to protect the national parks public support would be necessary. Mather sought support by coordinating with newspapers and businesses such as railroads to raise awareness and promote tourism. These early efforts created the first public support for such policies, but as historian Neil Maher argues, the environmental movement's origins as a popular

[5] Zeb Larson, "Silver Falls State Park and the Early Environmental Movement," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 112, (Spring 2011): 37-38.

enterprise can be traced to the New Deal era programs of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Works Progress Administration (WPA).[6] The CCC benefited young unemployed men when it fed and housed them in military style camps across the United States. The CCC put these men to work in projects that included reforestation, soil conservation, fire prevention, road construction, and park building. Their efforts provided these young men with positive experiences working in the outdoors that prepared them for later vocations. Their work also fostered an appreciation for nature and the environment they had helped to protect and develop into spaces that everyone could enjoy.[7] The State of Oklahoma, like many other states benefited from the efforts of the CCC through the establishment of its state park system.

Alabaster Cavern's history also follows the path of many state park histories in the United States with respect to the surrounding community's pursuit of its protection as a state park. While the caverns did not benefit from New Deal programs like many other state parks, Alabaster Caverns benefited from the support of local boosters. Businessmen and politicians in northwest Oklahoma sought the creation of the state park in order to preserve its unique geological formation as well as for the economic benefit of the region where it was located.

Alabaster Caverns' story predates the establishment of state parks in Oklahoma, with the first homesteaders arriving in the area during the Land Run of 1893 that opened the Cherokee Outlet. During the early days of its exploration, the system of caves that make up the park were called the Bat Caves because of the large bat population that could

[6] Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 225.

[7] Ibid.

be seen emerging from the caves each evening at sunset. Over the next three decades, area residents discovered that although the land above the caves proved unfit for farming, there were resources below the surface that they could extract for economic gain, including gypsum, bat guano, and alabaster. Throughout each transfer of ownership or lease agreement, the caves provided a local playground for area visitors seeking a day of adventure, ultimately leading to the acquisition of the property by the State of Oklahoma for the development of a state park. During the past sixty years, the State of Oklahoma's management policies dictating the use and preservation of Alabaster Caverns have continued to evolve into a stewardship advocating conservation, preservation, and education.

Although the land was originally claimed during the Cherokee Outlet Land Run in 1893, it was not proved on by the original claimant, nor was it further developed or commercialized, until 1928. In 1910, Hugh Litton purchased a 160 acre tract of land from the Department of the Interior for $173.84.[8] In 1911, Mr. E. L. Leighton purchased a forty acre parcel from the State of Oklahoma.[9] These two tracts of land now make up Alabaster Caverns State Park. In 1931, Dr. James M. Schumann and his nephew, Albert H. Grass, owner-financed the purchase of Litton's property and Schumann worked to develop it for six years. Then in 1939, another nephew, Charles Grass, bought the caves, and over the next thirteen years, he promoted and further developed the caverns into a

[8] *Final Receipt Record Book B,* Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 598. The land description is SW 1/4 Section 28 in Township 26 North, Range 18 West.

[9] *Miscellaneous Records 1*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 52. The land description is the NW section of NW Section 33 in Township 26 North, Range 18 West. Under the Oklahoma Enabling Act of June 16, 1906: section 33 was reserved " for charitable and penal institutions and public buildings, shall be apportioned and disposed of as the Legislature of said State may prescribe." Oklahoma Enabling Act, June 16, 1906 c. 3335, §8, 34 Stat. 273, http://www.clo.state.ok.us/OKLAHOMAENABLINGACTSections7thru12.pdf (accessed April 8, 2013).

tourist attraction. In 1953, Grass sold the Alabaster Caverns to the State of Oklahoma so that people enjoy the natural wonder rather than allow the caves to pass to another private owner and an uncertain future.[10] Today, Alabaster Caverns is one of Oklahoma's thirty-five state parks managed by the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department.

To appreciate the recent human history of Alabaster Caverns it is necessary to discuss briefly the geological history of the land. During the Permian Age, around 270 million years ago, a large shallow inland sea extended from the Gulf of Mexico across Texas and Oklahoma into eastern Kansas and southeastern Nebraska. For millions of years the waters rose and fell. When the inland sea eventually receded, it left behind layers of gypsum, dolomite, and shale deposits. With the receding waters, cracks formed in the rock seabed and allowed water to channel down beneath the earth, dissolving and eroding away soil and rock over millions of years forming the caves in the Cimarron River Valley of northwest Oklahoma, including Alabaster Caverns.[11]

The main cave at Alabaster Caverns State Park is the largest gypsum cave in the world developed for tourism.[12] Out of 185 designated "show caves" in the United States, Alabaster Caverns is the only gypsum cave.[13] The main chamber of the cave is 2,256 feet long.[14] The cave extends approximately a half a mile past the tour exit, but this area of the cave is small and clogged with fallen boulders. It, therefore, is not accessible to

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[10] Louise B. James, "Englishman Shaped the Lore of Alabaster Caverns," *The Oklahoman*, August 9, 1987; Senator Claude E. Seaman, to C. A. Lile, Chairman Alabaster Caverns Committee at Freedom, January 5, 1953, Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[11] Myers, *Guide to Alabaster Cavern and Woodward County, Oklahoma*, 7.

[12] Arthur J. Myers, "Alabaster Caverns," *Oklahoma Geology Notes*, 20 (June 1960): 132.

[13] Caywood, "Alabaster Caverns State Park History," n.p.

[14] Myers, "Alabaster Caverns," *Oklahoma Geology Notes*, 132. See Appendix C for a map of the cave.

visitors.[15] The maximum depth of the floor of the cave is eighty feet below the surface and the roof of the cave ranges from twenty to forty feet thick from the ceiling of the cave to the land surface above. The entrance to Alabaster Cavern is through a collapsed sinkhole on the side of a north-facing cliff in Cedar Canyon, a narrow, steep-sided valley, about two miles long. Cedar Creek runs through the canyon and drains into Long Creek, which drains into the Cimarron River. The Cimarron River forms the boundary between Woods and Woodward counties five miles north of Alabaster Caverns State Park. [16]

Gypsum is hydrous calcium sulfate and comes in five varieties: satinspar, gypsite, alabaster, selenite, and rock gypsum. Of the five varieties, Alabaster Caverns includes rock gypsum, selenite, and alabaster.[17] Satinspar is fibrous with a silky luster. Gypsite, also called gypseous clay, is composed of porous earthy impure gypsum mixed with sand and clay. [18] Rock gypsum is medium to coarse grained forming extensive thick sedimentary beds.[19] Gypsum is a soft mineral, rating a two on Mohs hardness scale of one to ten and a fingernail will easily scratch it.[20] It is used in a variety of construction materials including plaster, sheet rock, stucco, acoustic tiles, cement, and adhesives. Gypsum is also used in plaster molds for everything from pottery to surgical and dental

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[15] Myers, *Guide to Alabaster Cavern and Woodward County, Oklahoma*, 16.

[16] Myers, "Alabaster Caverns," *Oklahoma Geology Notes,* 132.

[17] "Alabaster Caverns Video Script," n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[18] Kaulir Kisor Chatterjee, "Gypsum," in *Gypsum: Properties, Production and Applications,* ed. Delia H. Sampson (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2011), 235.

[19] Chatterjee, "Gypsum," 235.

[20] Chatterjee, "Gypsum," 237; R. M. Santmyers, "Gypsum: its uses and preparation" (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Mines, 1929), 6. In Hathi Trust Digital Library, http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074126775#page/5/mode/1up (accessed February 20, 2013).

work. Other uses for gypsum include paper making, fertilizer, soil conditioning, insecticides, paint, textiles, and to dilute certain pharmaceuticals to reduce the concentration of active ingredients.[21] Selenite, a transparent crystal, is seen throughout Alabaster Caverns. One of the most impressive formations of the crystal is a large selenite boulder just past the Encampment Room alongside the visitor's path. Selenite can split into thin leaves, which can bend but will not spring back to shape the way thin leaves of mica do. Because of its resemblance to mica, early settlers throughout the southwest region of the United States often incorrectly called selenite "isinglass".[22] Alabaster is massive, fine grained, granular, and compact, and artists often used it to make fine art objects. The main cavern contains deposits of #1 grade Alabaster that is good for carving artwork, décor, or making jewelry. It is for the beautiful polished surfaces of Alabaster found throughout the caverns that the early owner and developer of the park, Dr. J. M. Schumann, chose to name the geological formation formerly known by local residents as the "Bat Caves."[23]

Historians have not studied the history of the human exploration, use, conservation, or preservation of Alabaster Caverns; and very few scholars have examined Oklahoma State Parks' history.[24] The Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office

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[21] Chatterjee, "Gypsum," 237-238, 244.

[22] Johan August Udden, "The Deep Boring at Spur," *Bulletin of the University of Texas: Scientific Series* No. 28 (October 5, 1914): 20; Johan August Udden, *Aids to Identification of Geological Formations,* (Austin: University of Texas, 1919): 14.

[23] "Store House of Nature's Art," *The Oklahoman*, September 6, 1936, n.p.

[24] "Final Survey Report Intensive-Level Survey of New Deal-Era State Parks in Oklahoma," Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, June 1993. In Oklahoma History Center Research Center Online, http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/thematic/newdealparks.pdf (accessed March 30, 2013); Maria N. Kluemper, "Oklahoma Residents' Perceptions of State Parks" (master's thesis, Oklahoma State University, July 2005); Kluemper provides a very brief overview of the history of State Parks in

conducted an architectural and historic resource survey of ten state parks that the National Park Service and the CCC developed during the New Deal, but these state parks all pre-date the establishment of Alabaster Caverns State Park.[25] The State Historic Preservation Office intended the report to help Tourism and Recreation Department identify historically and architecturally significant resources. The report would also identify resources eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as well as help the department plan for the preservation of significant resources.[26] There are histories addressing state parks in Texas, Arizona, Minnesota, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and South Carolina.[27] Much of recent scholarship addresses the role of New Deal programs in developing state parks and the National Park Service, and often attributes the successful establishment and growth of state parks to the Civilian Conservation Corps camps throughout each state and their work on many of the earliest state parks.[28] Alabaster Caverns did not become a state park until 1953, so it does not fit into the

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Oklahoma. Her thesis provides an analysis of the use and perceptions of the parks with the goal of developing a planning tool for Oklahoma State Parks.

[25] "Final Survey Report Intensive-Level Survey of New Deal-Era State Parks in Oklahoma," Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, June 1993, iv.

[26] Ibid, iv.

[27] Chester H. Armstrong, comp., *Oregon State Parks: History, 1917-1963* (Salem: Oregon State Highway Department, 1965); Thomas R. Cox, *The Park Builders: A History of State Parks in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); Roy W. Meyer, *Everyone's Country Estate: A History of Minnesota's State Parks* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991); Tara Mitchell Mielnik, *New Deal, New Landscape: The Civilian Conservation Corps and South Carolina's State* Parks (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2011); Jay M. Price, *Gateways to the Southwest: The Story of Arizona State Parks* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2004); James Wright Steely, *Parks For Texas: Enduring Landscapes of the New Deal* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

[28] Ney C. Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America: A Critical Review* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004);; Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Perry H. Merrill, *Roosevelt's Forest Army: A History of the Civilian Conservation* Corps (Montpelier, VT: Perry H. Merrill, 1981); Mielnik, *New Deal, New Landscape;* Hal K. Rothman, *Preserving Different Pasts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

pattern of many of the state park histories that examine the importance of New Deal programs. Nor did Alabaster Caverns directly benefit from any of the New Deal programs. The CCC was important to the first state parks in Oklahoma as well as states like South Carolina; both did not have a state park system until after the establishment of the CCC.[29] Other states like Texas experienced rapid growth of their state parks system because of New Deal programs and work conducted by the CCC and guidance by the National Parks Service.[30] After the termination of New Deal programs that helped establish many of the first state parks around the nation, gaining the support of town and regional boosters and businesses became important to the selection and establishment of state parks. Local boosters were essential to the establishment of Alabaster Caverns as a state park. Local businessman and State Senator Claude E. Seaman worked on behalf of his constituents to ensure the creation of the state park.[31]

Additional historical research has explored the national parks more than state parks.[32] In 2004, Ney Landrum, director emeritus of Florida State Parks presented his

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[29] Kluemper, "Oklahoma Residents' Perceptions of State Parks," 42; Mielnik, *New Deal, New Landscape,* xi.

[30] Steely, *Parks for Texas: Enduring Landscapes of the New Deal*, 177.

[31] Senator Claude E. Seaman to C. A. Lile, Chairman Alabaster Caverns Committee at Freedom, January and February 1953, Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park Office.

[32] John A. Baden and Donald Leal, *The Yellowstone Primer: Land and Resource Management in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem* (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute For Public Policy, 1990); Russell E. Dickenson, *Our National Parks: Current Issues and Future Directions* (Stillwater, OK: 1984 Nat Walker Lectureship Oklahoma State University, 1984); Chris J. Magoc, *Yellowstone: The Creation and Selling of an American Landscape, 1870-1903* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Kathy S. Mason, *Natural Museums: U.S. National Parks, 1872-1916* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004); Judith L. Meyer, *The Spirit of Yellowstone: The Cultural Evolution of a National Park* (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996); *National Parks for the Future* (Washington, DC: The Conservation Foundation, 1972); Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1998); Rothman, *Preserving Different* Pasts; Paul Schullery and Lee Whittlesey, *Myth and History in the Creation of Yellowstone National Park* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003); Harlan D.

work on the State Park Movement in America, but he did not intend for it to serve as a history of all state parks in the United States, a daunting task considering the number of parks. Instead, he looked at the emergence of what he argued was a state park movement across the nation that sought to preserve and make a variety of landscapes accessible to the public. Landrum argues that the first National Conference on State Parks in 1921 served as a catalyst for this movement.[33] National Parks Service Director Stephen Mather called for the conference because of the limitations put onto the National Park Service on the kinds of landscapes that could be designated as national parks. Only those landscapes that were considered unique and breathtaking enough to be described as the crown jewels of the North American landscape could become a national park. Mather was concerned that other potential park lands were being left unprotected and unappreciated; a void that the creation of state parks could fill. Mather's solution was to call for the National Conference to promote the growth and spread of state parks across the nation.[34]

There has also been very little historical research on caves although there are many articles and books dedicated to various scientific aspects of caves, ranging from their geological histories, theories regarding formation, and the delicate ecological environment of caves and their flora and fauna. Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico and Mammoth Cave in Kentucky are both national parks as well as caves and historians have

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Unrau, *Basin and Range: A History of Great Basin National Park, Nevada* (U. S. Dept. of the Interior: National Park Service, 1990).

[33] Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America: A Critical Review*, xii.

[34] Ibid, 76-78.

examined their history but nothing beyond.[35] Alabaster Caverns has been the subject of several geological articles and the work produced by Arthur Myers in the 1960s remains the standard source on its geological history.[36]

The sources used in this history of Alabaster Caverns were found in the historical files at the park's office, state archives, guidebooks, brochures, advertising handbills, government reports, and county property records. Alabaster Caverns' historical files include several letters and interviews with individuals who visited the caverns beginning in 1910 through the 1930s--these remain the earliest documented accounts about the caverns. Research also included newspaper articles chronicling the activities and events that took place at Alabaster Caverns beginning with the first known account in 1906. Most of the published work regarding the Alabaster Caverns can be found in newspaper and popular magazine articles devoted to promoting tourism of the area; some of these articles also reveal significant events in the park's history.

[35] Katie Algeo, "Mammoth Cave and the Making of Place," *Southeastern* Geography 44, (May 2004), 27-47. Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 158-66.

[36] J. Myers et al., *Guide to Alabaster Cavern and Woodward County, Oklahoma,* Oklahoma Geological Survey Guide Book XV (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991), 7-16.

CHAPTER II

NATIVE AMERICANS AND EARLY SETTLERS IN NORTHWEST OKLHOMA

While there are no known documented instances of human use of Alabaster Caverns before Euro-American settlement of the area in the latter part of the nineteenth century, stories about Native Americans, outlaws, and early explorers in the vicinity abound. Locals have passed down stories; letters, interviews, and newspaper accounts document early speculation about the possible early inhabitants of Alabaster Caverns. It is reasonable to speculate that early nomadic tribes of Native Americans stumbled upon the caves, especially when historical records document many plains tribes located approximately 35 miles southwest of Fort Supply. Unfortunately, all archeological evidence that might have once existed appears to have vanished as adventurous explorers toured the caverns and likely took away souvenirs of their visit when they returned home, leaving behind only stories and speculation. There remains no archeological evidence of human occupation or use of Alabaster Caverns before the Euro-American settlement of the Cherokee Outlet in the 1893. In an article in *The Oklahoman* in September 1936, Dr. James Schumann, an early developer of the cave claimed, "The caves offered refuge from the enemy and storm. Tools and weapons were discovered in the cave, along with

buffalo bones that gave evidence of feasts. A chamber smoked by signal fires is called the Encampment room."[1]

Newspapers printed stories about outlaws like the Dalton Gang whose exploits in southeastern Kansas put them in close proximity to the Bat Caves and Cedar Canyon, where they supposedly hid.[2] Nevertheless, evidence of outlaw use of the caverns has also disappeared. It is probable that Native Americans knew about the caves because they were known to travel in the area around the caves and could not help but notice the large bat population that announced its location every summer evening when they exited the caves to hunt for insects. For this same reason, it would have been easy for early European and American explorers, as well as outlaws and bandits, to stumble upon the existence of the Alabaster Caverns.

The earliest European explorers in the area were the Spanish conquistadors. Francisco Vasquez de Coronado crossed northwestern Oklahoma in 1541, and his expedition chronicles the migratory people, probably Plains Apaches, who lived in small tents made of animal skin and lived off bison meat.[3] By the late seventeenth century, the French claimed the vast area west of the Mississippi River, named it Louisiana, and introduced a plan to trap and profit from the region's fauna.[4] Louisiana became United States territory in 1803 and soon American explorers and traders moved into the West. One of these traders, Thomas James of St. Louis, led a party of trappers up the North

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[1] "Store House of Nature's Art," *The Oklahoman*, September 6, 1936, n.p.

[2] Otis Bickford, "The Hidden Secrets of Cedar Canyon," *The Freedom Call*, September 1967, n.p.

[3] A.M. Gibson, "History of Woodward County," *Guide to Alabaster Cavern and Woodward County, Oklahoma*, Oklahoma Geological Survey Guide Book XV (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991), 25.

[4] Ibid.

Canadian River to the mouth of Wolf Creek in present Woodward County, approximately thirty-five miles southwest of Alabaster Caverns. James established a stockade to store his goods and serve as a trading base with the Comanche and Kiowa, while men from his party trapped for furs and hides along Wolf Creek and on the plains of northwest Oklahoma.[5]

Traffic in the area steadily increased during the nineteenth century as American settlers traveled through the region on their way from Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico, which was part of Mexico until the Mexican War. Kiowa and Comanche leaders argued that these emigrants scared away the game and destroyed bison, deer, and antelope herds at the same time they were facing incursion from northern Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes drifting south in search of game. Because of this increased traffic from multiple opposing cultures, conflicts developed. Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache bands customarily camped each season in the Wolf Creek and upper North Canadian River area, and they resented intrusion.[6] Two of the more popular watering areas were at nearby Osage Springs and Boiling Springs--now a state park located just twenty-five miles southwest of Alabaster Caverns. Deep rutted trails near the springs and scattered camp debris suggest the frequent use of these watering points by wandering Native American bands.[7]

After the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the United States government forced many eastern tribes to move west to Indian Territory. In the Treaty of New Echota of 1835, the

[5] Gibson, "History of Woodward County," 25-26.

[6] Gibson, "History of Woodward County," 26.

[7] Ibid.

Cherokee ceded their claims on land east of the Mississippi River to the United States, which effectively forced them to move west to Indian Territory. In Article two of the treaty, the government outlined the lands in the territory given to the Cherokee as well as the seven million acres, which included Alabaster Caverns, as an outlet to hunting lands. [8] The region was mostly unused by the Cherokees or anyone else until after the Civil War when the growth of American interest in westward expansion and settlement led to demands for the plains tribes to be moved to reservations in western Indian Territory.[9]

The Kiowas, Comanches, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and other tribes failed to remain on their reservations and continued to hunt throughout northwest Oklahoma and into Kansas, Colorado, and Texas. These incursions brought increased attention by the United States military in an effort to contain the tribes to their assigned reservations. In 1868, the War Department ordered General Philip Sheridan, commander of the United States forces on the frontier, to establish a military post where the troops could watch and intercept Plains Tribes, if needed. The site of the new post was at the junction of Wolf and Beaver Creeks.[10] During November 1868, Major John H. Page led a contingent of five companies of the Third Infantry from Fort Dodge into the Cherokee Outlet with orders to construct fortifications and organize the troops as a garrison force.[11]

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[8] Charles J. Kappler, editor, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties,* Vol. II, Treaties, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904). http://digital.library.okstate.edu/KAPPLER/VOL2/treaties/che0439.htm#mn3 (accessed on January 31, 2013).

[9] Gibson, "History of Woodward County," 27.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

General George Armstrong Custer and eleven troops of the Seventh Cavalry escorted the supply train that arrived at the Wolf Creek site on November 21, 1868. Major Page expected additional troops from Fort Lyon in Colorado, Fort Bascom in New Mexico, and the Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry to arrive and to contact hostile Native Americans as well as move them south of the Cimarron and Canadian Rivers. The unpredictable Indian Territory weather brought a winter storm that dropped a foot of snow and they were delayed. Impatient to act before the warriors learned of their intentions, General Custer led troops south. On November 27, Custer's scouts found a large Indian village in a bend of the upper Washita and attacked. Identified in official reports as the Battle of the Washita, the attack so surprised the villagers that there was little resistance and the attack resulted in the massacre of over one hundred Cheyenne men, women, and children.[12]

Custer and the Seventh Cavalry returned from this campaign to the Wolf Creek site to discover Fort Supply's construction progressing. Fort Supply, known as Camp Supply in its earliest history, was the first permanent American settlement in Woodward County and northwestern Oklahoma. It became a key defensive outpost in Indian Territory, assigned to suppress uprisings from the surrounding Native American tribes. Fort Supply also supervised the opening of the Unassigned Lands with the first Land Run in 1889.[13]

After the establishment of military outposts like Fort Supply in western Indian Territory, cattle ranchers established their operations in northwest Oklahoma. Cattle ranching was one of the fastest growing industries west of the Mississippi River after the

[12] Gibson, "History of Woodward County," 27.

[13] Ibid, 27-28.

Civil War. The range cattle industry began in Texas and expanded northward with cattle drives running through Indian Territory. Three of the great cattle trails crossed the Cherokee Outlet, and ranchers allowed herds of cattle, bound for market, to graze on the native grasses that had previously sustained bison, antelope, and deer. The Dodge City Trail passed through present-day Woodward County.[14] The Cherokee leadership in Tahlequah learned of the cattle ranchers' occupation of their lands and sent representatives to collect grazing fees from the cattlemen. They successfully collected fees from many cattlemen while other ranchers moved their herds in and out of the Outlet to dodge the fee collectors.[15]

In 1883, a group of cattle ranchers established the Cherokee Strip Livestock Association.[16] It represented more than one hundred individuals and corporations owning more than three hundred thousand head of cattle. The Association's board provided for brand registration, tightened control of rustlers and predators, and established methods for assigning ranges in the Outlet. The Association's officers negotiated a lease of the outlet from the Cherokees for five years at $100,000 per year.[17]

In 1888, the Cherokee Strip Livestock Association renegotiated their lease with the Cherokee Nation for $200,000; but in 1890, President Benjamin Harrison prohibited all cattle and livestock from being brought into the Outlet for herding or grazing purposes.[18] Under pressure from the government and settlers lobbying for more land, the

[14] Ibid, 28.

[15] Ibid, 28-29.

[16] Ibid, 29.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Fair Play, "By the Favor of Mr. Noble," *The New York Times*, June 25, 1892, 9.

United States reached an agreement with the Cherokee Nation. The government passed an act on March 3, 1893 directing the Secretary of the Interior to pay the Cherokee Nation "eight million three hundred thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary in addition . . . for the right, title, interest, and claims which the said nation of Indians may have in and to" the Cherokee Outlet.[19] On September 16, 1893, the United States government opened the Outlet in the Land Run of 1893, including the two hundred acres that make up Alabaster Caverns State Park.[20]

Before the United States government opened the Cherokee Outlet to settlement there remained some non-Native American interest in the area. John William Harmon and his partner hauled supplies from Hutchinson, Kansas to Fort Supply, and their route passed over the Bat Caves.[21] According to the story passed down by Harmon to his son, Victor, and then his great-granddaughter, Mary Allen, Harmon and his partner Doug were traveling in 1875 when they saw a bear and her two cubs playing in a canyon. Doug's bulldog chased the bears into the entrance of the cave but the men stopped from pursuing the bears further because of "burning quana [sic]".[22]

Northwestern Oklahomans wove narratives about the Bat Caves deeply into the fabric of local legends that early residents shared in letters and personal interviews as

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[19] G. W. Doughty, Sr., *The Homestead Laws, with a Brief Description of Oklahoma Territory, Including the Celebrated Cherokee Outlet,* Reprint, (Ponca City, OK: North Central Oklahoma Historical Association, 1998), 19.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Mary Allen, "Great Grandpa's Great Adventure and Other Information About the 'Bat Caves,'" Ashland High School, Ashland, Kansas, May 14, 1982, 1, Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[22] Allen, "Great Grandpa's Great Adventure and Other Information About the 'Bat Caves,'"1.

well as newspaper articles.[23] Early settlers passed down stories about outlaws like the Dalton Gang whose exploits in southeastern Kansas put them in the area of the nearby Bat Caves and Cedar Canyon, where the outlaws supposedly hid out after a bank hold up.[24] Other stories circulated about one of the largest horse stealing operations in the West having their headquarters near the mouth of Adderson Creek, a mile southeast of Freedom. "This operation served [as] a remount station for the many outlaws…. In one cave on the south rim of Cedar Canyon, are the decaying remains of saddles and other leather articles," and some of those saddles bear "the brass letters U.S. leading one to the supposition that their scope of operations must have included U. S. Cavalry horses."[25] The brass insignia was on display in the clubhouse on the property for a number of years until the structure burned along with all of its contents.

In an interview, Hugh Litton, the first owner of the 160 acre quarter section parcel that partially makes up the state park today talked about the outlaws known to hide out in far northwestern Indian Territory and No Man's Land. Litton said there were "tough customers" in the area and went on to explain, "The tough guys and fellers would hide out in the caves. They would get in there and keep in there."[26] V. F. Brock wrote about outlaws in the cave in a 1906 article reprinted in the *Mooreland Leader* in 1996. Brock explored the cave and wrote about it in the local newspaper; "'Panther Pete, the terror of

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[23] A search of the Indian-Pioneer Papers online through the Western History Collection's website (http://digital.libraries.ou.edu/whc/pioneer/) as well as the card file index at the Oklahoma History Center Research Center in Oklahoma City did not reveal any references to Alabaster Caverns, names and nicknames for the property, nor property owners.

[24] Otis Bickford, "The Hidden Secrets of Cedar Canyon," *The Freedom Call*, September 1967, n.p. Republished from *The Mooreland Leader,* August 3, 1906.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Bonnie Speer, Interview of Hugh Litton and Everett Hughes, 1965, n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

Cedar Canyon,' had left his autograph; so had 'Bloody Jack, villain of the cave,' for whose capture, dead or alive it is claimed there is offered a reward of $15,000."[27]

After the land run of 1893, settlers moved into the area to build homes and farms. Under the Homestead Act of 1862, once the homesteader staked his claim on a quarter section of land, he secured it with a visit to the nearest United States land office where he paid a fee of fourteen dollars. The homesteader had six months to begin living on the land, and make improvements to the property that he must maintain for a period of five years. Once these requirements were met, the homesteader found two people willing to vouch for him that he had completed the requirements by signing the "proof" document.[28] Bob Perry, a young man from Missouri, filed a claim on the 160 acres that included the caves. According to Hugh Litton, who later bought the property, Perry "built a dugout on it, but never did prove on it."[29] Perry wanted to go back home to Missouri; therefore, he abandoned the claim, letting the land revert to government ownership.[30]

While the rough land above the caverns remained unclaimed until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the Caves became a place for early recreation and exploration. At the time that Hugh Litton arrived in the area in 1902, he was not

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[27] V. F. Brock, "Remember When... From the Leader's Early Files: A Visit to the Great Bat Cave," *The Mooreland Leader,* August 1, 1996, n.p. Republished from *Mooreland Leader,* August 3, 1906.

[28] Ralph E. Randels, "The Homesteader and the Development of Woodward County," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 17, no. 3 (September 1939), 286; *Homestead Act of 1862,* U.S. Statutes at Large, 37th Cong., Sess. II, Chap. 75, p. 392-393, http://web.ebscohost.com.argo.library.okstate.edu/ehost/detail?sid=1cf09489-9b19-4db6-8b56-0c80488a17ea%40sessionmgr10&vid=7&hid=26&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=prh&AN=21212743 (accessed February 21, 2013).

[29] Speer, interview of Litton and Hughes.

[30] Ibid.

interested in acquiring the land around the caves because it was unsuitable for farming.[31] According to Litton, nobody wanted to own the caves, but they did want to explore them and "people would gather at the cave and go thru [sic] in groups."[32]

Four men from Mooreland made up one group of explorers. V. F. Brock, Dr. W. S. Oyler, F. M. Jones, and Editor Schnoebelen of the *Mooreland Leader* planned a day trip to explore the Bat Caves. Brock shared the experience in an article he wrote for the *Mooreland Leader* in August of 1906.[33] The foursome carefully planned their trip, packing dinner and horse feed as well as lanterns, torches, a gallon of kerosene, a compass, a thermometer, and old clothes for the trek through the big cave. Brock recounted their adventure in the Cavern and described details that remain unchanged today. The tour took longer in 1906 than it does today because there were no steps, cleared paths, or electric lights. Brock and his party must have entered through the southern opening, which serves as the exit today, because he states "100 feet from the entrance we read a notice on the wall 'Register farther on.'"[34] Brock continued with his account, "We soon entered a large room beneath a dome fifteen feet high. On the smooth walls were many names, placed there by means of pencil, chalk, knife, or torch smoke."[35] The name "C. L. Clingerman" and the date "May 17, 1900" are included among the

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] V. F. Brock, "Remember When. . . From the *Leader*'s Early Files: A Visit to the Great Bat Cave," Reprinted in *Mooreland Leader*, July25, 1996; August 1,1996, n.p. Republished from *Mooreland Leader*, August 3, 1906.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

autographs.[36] This marking still exists in what tour guides call Graffiti Hall toward the end of the modern guided tour, and it is as clear as if Mr. Clingerman had written it yesterday. See Appendix D for photographs of the markings. One of the four explorers on that trip, F. M. Jones, informed his companions, "Klingerman [sic] was the man who removed several car loads of guano from the cave in the summer of 1900. He got nine, ten [sic] and eleven dollars per ton for the fertilizer at Curtis, and it was shipped to San Francisco."[37]

Hugh Litton changed his mind about wanting to buy the caves in 1910. Litton explained that because the land joined some land of his and it had plenty of grass and water, he decided he wanted it after all.[38] Litton bought the southwest quarter section of Section 28, Township 26 North, Range 18 West from the Department of the Interior for $1.00 an acre plus filing fees, the total cost being $173.84.[39] The following year, E.L. Leighton bought the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of section 33 in Township 26 North, Range 18 West—the forty acre parcel south of Litton's— from the State of Oklahoma for $400.00.[40] Eventually, Charles Grass purchased these two parcels and combined them to form the two hundred acre tract that he would sell to the State of Oklahoma to create Alabaster Caverns State Park.[41]

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[36] Ibid. See Appendix D for photograph by Ammie Bryant, October 8, 2007.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Speer, interview of Litton and Hughes.

[39] *Final Receipt Book B,* Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 598.

[40] *Miscellaneous Record Book 1,* Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 52.

[41] *Deed Record Book 78*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 342; *Mortgage Record Book 71*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 1; *Miscellaneous Record Book 48*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 533.

Like Clingerman, other people mined the Bat Caves of its natural resources. Everett Hughes bought a farm nearby in 1919 and lived there for nearly forty-five years.[42] Enterprising community members removed bat guano (or dung) from the cave to use as prized fertilizer. In a 1965 interview, Hughes explained,

> We worked in there all winter. There was more cave than we ever found. Sold enough guano out of there to buy a new Ford Car. Had a conveyor that hauled it out. Took it to Mooreland and shipped it aout [sic]. . . . People still go there and get the guano for their flowers.[43]

Bat guano was not the only resource locals removed from the cave. According to tour guides at Alabaster Caverns State Park and the State Capitol Building in Oklahoma City, between 1914 and 1917, white alabaster was mined from the big cave and fashioned into the handrail on the second floor rotunda of the Oklahoma State Capitol Building.[44] However, after consulting the State Capitol Building Commission records, it is not possible to confirm the use of alabaster anywhere in the construction of the Oklahoma State Capitol.[45]

As the owner of the property in 1910, Litton never charged visitors to tour the Bat Caves. When people found him on his farm, Litton stopped his work to take them through the big cave.[46] Others simply explored the caverns by themselves; there was no attendant, and Litton did not demand visitors seek his permission. Harry Heidlebaugh

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[42] Speer, interview of Litton and Hughes.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Caywood, "Alabaster Caverns State Park History," n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[45] State Capitol Commission records, 1913-1917, Oklahoma State Archives and Records Management, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[46] Speer, interview of Litton and Hughes.

went through the big cave in 1924, and in 1987, he shared his recollections with Alabaster Caverns State Park staff, in a letter.

> As I remember there was [sic] 25 to 30 kids and teacher from the Wayside School around 4 miles west of Buffalo. We decided to go to the bat caves at Freedom. . . . .
>
> 4 of us boys in the 7th & 8th grades started through at 8:00 that morning. We unwound a ball of binding twine so we could come back if we needed to. I don't know how far we went when we saw a hole in the ceiling the shape of a dagger. . . .
>
> We helped one another up in that upper room. We found a skeleton of a man, part of a saddle, and a 5 gal. Kerosene can up there. We knew the school wouldn't believe us about the skeleton so we brought the pelvic bone out with us compared it with pictures to prove it was a man. . . . We kept on going, I don't remember of thinking about getting lost. We came out about 3.4 miles south where we went in. . . . It was around 1:30 that afternoon when we got out."[47]

Heidlebaugh concluded his letter wondering if anyone else had ever found that room. In 1987, the Oklahoma Grotto, a wild-caving organization, was planning to survey the caverns further to see if they could find the room, the skeleton, and the artifacts Heidlebaugh described.[48] Park staff and Grotto members are sure that Heidlebaugh's "hole in the ceiling the shape of a dagger" was Keyhole dome in the middle section of the Cavern.[49] Despite this lead on the location, explorers have never found the skeleton or other artifacts Heidlebaugh described in his letter.

During the late 1920s, local residents began making modifications to the caverns to facilitate visitor exploration and appreciation. William Weir Harvey grew up on a small ranch three miles from the Bat Caves, where he noticed many people coming from

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[47] Harry Heidlebaugh to Sherry K. Beagley, Historical Site Attendant, Alabaster Caverns State Park, August 27, 1987. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[48] Carolyn B. Leonard, "First Cavern Trip One of Discovery," *The Oklahoman,* October 11, 1987, n.p.

[49] Ibid.

the other side of the Cimarron River in their wagons and buggies to picnic and explore the cave.[50] In early 1928, Harvey's friend, Delbert Swain, suggested that they should rent the land, install electric lights, and charge admission. Harvey contacted the property owners and agreed on a lease for the two tracts of acreage owned by Litton and Leighton. The agreement stipulated that Harvey could have a one-year lease on the 160 acres owned by Litton if Harvey would furnish material for a one half mile fence. Harvey also agreed to give Litton half the profit from the admissions after the first year. Leighton agreed to the lease of his nearby forty acre tract in return for free passes for the Leighton family for the first year. After settling on the terms for acquiring the two hundred acres surrounding the caves, Harvey consulted an attorney regarding the admission he planned to charge and pertinent taxes on the profits. Harvey set the admission at twenty-five cents per person for the first year, and increased the charge to fifty cents the second year.[51]

To make the admission charge worth the fee, Harvey made changes in the cave to facilitate an easier, safer tour. Harvey arranged to purchase the town of Freedom's old light plant and with the help of a local mechanic, Emel Archer, they wired the cave for electricity.[52] Harvey and his brother installed over one hundred electric lights throughout the Bat Cave including the domes and recesses.[53] He also cleared pathways of dirt and

[50] William Weir Harvey, "The Bat Caves," 13 December 1989, n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

rocks, and added new stairways and handrails.[54] Harvey opened the modified Bat Caves for tours on Easter Sunday 1928.[55] On December 27, 1928, Harvey lost the forty acres they leased from Leighton when E. A. and R. A. Haines bought it as part of a 2,845 acre transaction.[56] The lease agreement for the 160 acre tract with Litton ended on May 4, 1931 when Dr. James M. Schumann and Albert. H. "Bert" Grass bought the acreage from Litton.[57]

Schumann and Grass purchased the southwest quarter of section 28 in Township 26 North, Range 18 West from Litton for six thousand dollars. Their 1931 purchase of Litton's acreage was the first step in an endeavor to establish the Cal-homa Development Corporation.[58] Schumann and Grass formed Cal-homa to purchase and develop the Bat Caves into a resort and tourist destination. They sold shares of the corporation to interested parties, such as Grass's brother, Charles Grass, a merchant seaman originally born in England who travelled the world.[59] The sale of the shares was intended to help finance the development of the property as a tourist attraction that would become a moneymaking enterprise for shareholders. Schumann and Grass financed the purchase through Litton by contracting to pay five hundred dollars in a down payment and five

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[54] "Come Visit the Big Mysterious Bat Cave," Handbill, Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[55] Harvey, "The Bat Caves."

[56] *Deed Book 57*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 426; *Miscellaneous Record Book 42*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 286.

[57] *Miscellaneous Record Book 33*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 597; Harvey, "The Bat Caves." Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[58] *Miscellaneous Record Book 33*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 598.

[59] James Schumann Probate Records, Case No. 01704, Woodward County Court Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma; Louise B. James, "Englishman Shaped the Lore of Alabaster Caverns," The *Oklahoman*, August 9, 1987.

hundred dollars due each six months afterwards. According to the terms of the contract, if Schumann and Grass defaulted on the payment, any previous payments would be considered rent of the property and ownership would remain with Litton.[60] Hugh Litton stated, "Only got $500 out of it. We entered the panic at that time and never got more than the down payment out of it."[61] Litton passed the ownership to his son Anderson D. Litton in 1935. Anderson retained the property until December 28, 1939.[62]

Despite these property records, other records, including two newspaper articles from 1936 and 1937, describe Dr. James M. Schumann as the owner. A 1936 feature in *The Oklahoman* includes photographs of Schumann at various points of interest in the park and the cavern as well as the nearby home where he and his family lived while they had worked to develop the caverns and surrounding property into a park since 1931.[63] In 1936 and again in 1938, workers with the New Deal's program the Federal Writers Project wrote about the history, geology, flora, and fauna of Alabaster Caverns citing James Schumann as one of the sources and listing him as an owner of the property.[64]

Early Oklahoma Territory settlers named the cavern "The Bat Caves" because of the millions of bats that made the cave their home and swarmed out at dusk to darken the sky; but during the 1930s, the name changed along with the property's ownership. Before

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[60] *Miscellaneous Record Book 33*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 597.

[61] Speer, interview of Litton and Hughes.

[62] *Deed Record Book 76*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 377; *Deed Record Book* 75, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, *284*.

[63] "Store House of Nature's Art," *The Oklahoman*, September 6, 1936, n.p.; "Funeral Set Today For Bat Cave Owner," *The Oklahoman*, May 24, 1937, n.p.

[64] Stella Yowell, "The Cedar Canyon Park at Freedom," November 9, 1936, Federal Writers Project, Oklahoma History Center Research Center, Location 0931.03, Collection #81.105, Box 75 File Folder 10; Bob Blair, "Cedar Canyon Park," December 13, 1938, Federal Writers Project, Oklahoma History Center Research Center, Location 0931.03, Collection #81.105, Box 75 File Folder 10.

settling in northwest Oklahoma to develop the caverns, Schumann had traveled the world from his native Luxembourg working as an oil geologist.[65] Schumann learned about the caverns and Cedar Canyon while running a pipeline in the area. In June 1931, a newspaper reported, "the Bat Caves, north of Mooreland, are to be made into a popular pleasure resort by the new owners of the land, Dr. J. M. Schumann and A. H. Grass."[66] According to the article, "Surveying and testing of formation structures are part of the plans being carried out as a preliminary course to construction of buildings and entertainment for a most attractive resort and playgrounds."[67]

Schumann, his wife Johanna, and three children made their home on the property while Schumann spent the next five years developing the caverns and Cedar Canyon Park. In 1936, *The Oklahoman* featured Dr. Schumann's development of the cavern, stating, "The Alabaster Caverns, they have been named by the man who has spent $17,000 to make their beauty more easily accessible to the casual cave sightseers."[68] Schumann planned to build an inn that would be air-conditioned by piping the cool air from the caverns, while natural gas would provide the fuel for other improvements. Schumann also planned to tap the streams running through the caverns for fresh water. Schumann estimated that it would take fifteen years for his plans to be realized.[69]

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[65] "Store House of Nature's Art;" "Funeral Set Today For Bat Cave Owner."

[66] "Bat Caves a Popular Resort," Unknown Newspaper, June 4, 1931, n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[67] Ibid.

[68] "Store House of Nature's Art" *The Oklahoman*, September 6, 1936, n.p.

[69] Ibid.

The Great Depression and hard economic times took their toll on Schumann's vision for Alabaster Caverns. There were few visitors to the caverns during the 1930s, due in part to the limited advertising via scattered small roadside signs, and the remoteness of the caverns location in northwest Oklahoma. Unfortunately, Cal-homa Stock failed to sell and less than a year after the feature in the *Oklahoman*, Schumann died at the age of eighty.[70] Woodward County probate records reveal that Schumann left behind a wife, Joan Schumann, age fifty-three, daughter Maxine age eleven, and sons Edward and James, ages eight and seven. There was no will and Schumann's estate was appraised at 15,333 shares of Cal-homa Development Company valued at $500, one share of West Union Mutual Telephone Company stock valued at $35 and a 1930 Buick sedan. The Schumann family was destitute. Schumann's widow, acting as administratrix for the estate, petitioned the court for ownership of the sedan in lieu of a widow's allowance and she settled the debt claim of $5,564 filed by Charles Grass against his uncle's estate by selling all of the Cal-homa stock to Grass for $300.[71] According to the claim filed by Grass, he had paid Schumann $5,564 over the course of eighty-eight separate transactions from January 4, 1934 through April 29, 1937, less than a month before Schumann's death.[72]

In 1939, Charles Grass, Albert H. Grass's brother and James Schumann's nephew, purchased the two parcels of land that make up the two hundred acre Alabaster Cavern property including portions of Cedar Canyon. Often described as a trim Englishman

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[70] "Funeral Set Today For Bat Cave Owner," *The Oklahoman*, May 24, 1937, n.p.

[71] James Schumann Probate Records, Case No. 01704, Woodward County Court Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma

[72] Ibid.

from California, Charles Grass had previously worked as a merchant seaman and became a naturalized citizen of the United States.[73] Grass purchased the northwest section of the northwest Section 33 in Township 26 North, Range 18 West from Haines on August 2, 1939 for $2,000.[74] Nearly five months later on December 28, 1939, he purchased the 160 acre quarter section of the Southwest Section 28 in Township 26 North, Range 18 West from Anderson D. Litton for $3,133.[75]

Initially Charles Grass purchased the caverns with the intent to sell the bat guano for fertilizer, but he soon recognized the potential to open the caverns for tourism.[76] Through the clever execution of his vision and with the help of a resourceful team of employees, family members, and trusted companions, Grass continued his uncle's plans for developing the property into a tourist attraction. Betty Semmel, a Woodward resident whose family knew Grass well, said, "There wasn't much Mr. Grass couldn't do. . . . He was a very interesting person. He was a bachelor, had been around the world twice and once said the only places he hadn't been were the Arctic and Antarctic."[77]

Grass gathered a staff to help him carry out his plans to develop the caverns for tours. After World War II, his nephew Jack and his wife, Ethel joined Grass. Jack, a

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[73] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1940 United States Federal Census*, (Washington, DC: Department of Commerce, 1940). http://1940census.archives.gov/search/?search.state=OK&search.enumeration_district=76-15#filename=m-t0627-03341-00254.tif&name=76-15&type=image&state=OK&index=11&pages=12&bm_all_text=Bookmark (accessed on February 10, 2013).

[74] *Deed Record Book* 78. Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 342.

[75] *Mortgage Record Book* 71, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 1; *Miscellaneous Record Book 48*, Woodward County Clerk, Woodward, Oklahoma, 533.

[76] Louise B. James, "Englishman Shaped the Lore of Alabaster Caverns," The *Oklahoman*, August 9, 1987.

[77] Ibid.

carpenter, built cabins and many other structures at the park, and planted hundreds of trees for his uncle.[78] During the summers and weekends of her junior and senior year of high school, Louise Hunter, Betty Semmel's sister, worked as a tour guide in the caverns and helped in the gift shop selling pop, snacks, and souvenirs.[79] Roy Wilson served as caretaker, tour guide, and handy man throughout the 1940s until he retired in 1952. Although Wilson "only went through the fourth grade…he was real creative and able to think ahead" and these problem-solving skills were important in managing his responsibilities.[80] Wilson cut blocks of snow during the winter and packed them into cisterns near the caves to provide drinking water in the spring. He also made his own root beer and sold it at the caverns.[81]

Another important, yet unconventional, team member at Alabaster Caverns was Nicky, a tour guide, rattlesnake hunter, and collie dog. Grass first brought Nicky to the caverns when she was a puppy, and she became a hard worker as well as a companion. The collie served as an assistant to Wilson, the caretaker, according to his grandson, Eddie Burks, who spent much of his childhood at Alabaster Caverns.[82] If Wilson was busy with other chores when visitors arrived for a tour, a command sent Nicky with the group as their trusted guide. Nicky allowed her tours to stop and look while she patiently waited and if the power went out and the lights extinguished leaving visitors in total darkness—which occasionally happened—one only had to grab Nicky and let her lead

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Helen Barrett., "Nicky 'Nose' Caves," *Alva Review-Courier*, 27 April 1997, 1, 3; Caywood, "Alabaster Caverns State Park History."

[81] Barrett, "Nicky 'Nose' Caves," 3.

[82] Ibid.

the way out of the cave safely. She was also responsible for sniffing out rattlesnakes around the Park and in the Canyon. Once she found one, she barked, raising an alarm until someone would come to eliminate the threat. A constant companion to those working at Alabaster Caverns, Nicky passed away sometime around 1949, but left her paw prints imprinted in the concrete by one of the picnic shelters where they remain today as a reminder that she too was a part of the history of the caverns.[83]

Like the pioneers who came before him, Charles Grass mined the caverns of guano and alabaster. The mining of guano and tourism worked against each other as the bats moved deeper into the caves away from areas accessible by humans and it became too difficult to gather the guano. Mining alabaster became a more feasible and lucrative endeavor. R.C. Van Nostrand, Sr., Semmel and Hunter's father, owned Woodward Monument and taught Grass how to cut the Alabaster and remove it from the cave in large enough chunks for carving. Then, Van Nostrand taught Grass how to work with the mineral and make alabaster into items he could sell in the gift shop. Grass made ashtrays, powder boxes, nightlights, candlesticks, vases, and bookends. One of the largest products Grass sold was a $25 table lamp.[84]

While Charles Grass exploited the caverns' resources, he also continued to develop the property as a tourist destination. He made additional improvements to the walkways and steps, which include sections of the path used today.[85] Grass added to the interpretation of the caverns using imaginative descriptions and names for rock and

[83] Ibid, 1, 3.

[84] James, "Englishman Shaped the Lore of Alabaster Caverns."

[85] Barrett, "Nicky 'Nose' Caves," 3.

crystal formations, and other geological phenomena throughout the cave. Many of these names, such as "the devil's bathtub," "sweetheart dome," and "cathedral dome," are also used on the tour today.[86] By using the fanciful descriptions drawn from the human imagination to describe natural rock formations and points of interest throughout the caverns, Charles Grass was commercializing the cavern to promote tourism. The practice of naming natural features to differentiate them from other features is the first step towards "sight sacralization" as discussed by Dean MacCannell in *The Tourist.*[87]

Grass marketed the caverns to visitors around the state and the nation successfully garnering the attention and pride of the citizens of the State of Oklahoma. The timing of Grass's development and marketing of the caverns as a tourist destination coincided with the increase in domestic tourism and travel when World War II closed Europe to international travel. Although no specific visitation counts are available to researchers, contemporary newspaper accounts provide glimpses of this increase.[88] In 1940, Alabaster Caverns experienced a 50 percent increase in tourism and Oklahoma continued to see an increase in domestic tourism through 1941 and 1942. A 1941 article in *The Oklahoman* reported, "The current wars in Europe and Asia are making the American tourist an almost extinct species on those continents, and that's one reason Oklahomans

[86] "Opening Speech and Alabaster Caverns Tour Script with Points of Interest," n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[87] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken, 1976): 43-45.

[88] The State Archives at the Oklahoma Department of Libraries does not have visitation records for Alabaster Caverns State Park before or after it became a state park. The Park Manager was only able to provide me with visitation numbers from the past decade. All visitation accounts were gleaned from newspaper reports.

may look for crowded and lively tourist business in the state this year."[89] The automobile's role in democratizing travel in the 1920s and 1930s only expanded in post World War II America. The Great Depression that had economically devastated the nation ended during the economic boom of the war years, and with World War II over, the nation entered a period of renewed optimism and growth stemming from the United States' victory in war and economic prosperity.

The emerging state park system in Oklahoma also provided an excellent opportunity to promote local and regional tourism in the state; it was the perfect time for Charles Grass to promote Alabaster Caverns as a tourist destination. The state park movement was young in Oklahoma, established in the 1930s with the help of the National Park Service and Civilian Conservation Corps. Oklahoma citizens were beginning to appreciate their state's relatively young, yet unique, history that was closely associated with the state's environment and landscape.[90] Grass communicated a compelling awe and appreciation for the natural wonders of the caverns and Cedar Canyon, and the countryside where it is situated. Letters advertising the caverns promised that a visit to Alabaster Caverns was a "splendid investment that will pay you and your family rich dividends in scenery, beauty, interest and education."[91] Written during the 1940s, when romanticized visions of the West were popular in Hollywood movies, Grass also used imagery intended to assure visitors that Alabaster Caverns was located in the heart of the Wild West. Grass produced descriptive brochures boasting that

[89] "Tourists Expected to Crowd State Highways This Year," *The Oklahoman*, April 20, 1941, 26.

[90] Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board, "First Annual Report of the Division of State Parks," June 30, 1938.

[91] John H. Grass, Park Superintendent to Dear Friend. Advertisement Letter, Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

the caverns were in the “great Cimarron River country, doubly enshrined in the public heart by Edna Ferber’s famous novel and movie.”[92] Advertisements promised a constant temperature of fifty-five degrees Fahrenheit, no matter the season, in a “wonderland like the mystic cave of Kubla Kahn—magic beauty made visible by modern lighting.”[93]

Although not a pure preservationist, Grass served as a transitional figure between the influences of exploitation and extractive attitudes and the emerging conservationist ideas. When he purchased the property in 1939, and for several years afterwards, Grass mined both guano and alabaster from the caverns for profit; however, Van Nostrand's wife, Hope Owen, described an incident when Grass revealed his potential as a conservationist. Owen stated, "I have some wonderful memories of the cave. The bats were like a black cloud, and the maddest I ever saw Charley was when a young man stood near the entrance with a board in his hand swinging at the bats."[94] Grass exhibited emerging conservationist attitudes with his desire to protect the bats. By the late 1940s, Grass began planning for how he could insure Alabaster Caverns' future protection.

As early as 1947, Grass expressed an interest in the passing control of Alabaster Caverns to state or federal control as a park or monument.[95] During September of that year, the State Planning and Resources Board visited the caverns at a time when Grass reported his highest visitation numbers in history, "the total number of persons going

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[92] “Alabaster Caverns of Oklahoma, Woodward County. . . in the Famous Cimarron Country,” Brochure, Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park. The movie Grass refers to is *Cimarron* released in 1931 by RKO Radio Pictures.

[93] Ibid.

[94] James, "Englishman Shaped the Lore of Alabaster Caverns," n.p.

[95] "Caverns as State Park Favorable to Owner," *The Oklahoman*, August 3, 1947, 38.

through the caverns this year is now above 6,000 and they are still coming."[96] In 1952, due to Grass's failing health and his wish to protect the property from possible future private exploitation, prominent citizens and politicians from Woodward County began a movement to convince the State of Oklahoma to purchase the two hundred acres.[97] On September 1, 1953, the state bought Alabaster Caverns for $34,000.[98] When someone suggested that Grass should have received more money, Grass replied, "I wanted the state to get it so people would enjoy it."[99]

Charles Grass's development of Alabaster Caverns into a viable park and tourist attraction, as well as his enthusiasm and appreciation of the natural beauty of the caverns, canyon, and northwestern Oklahoma's western heritage, helped gain interest and support for the State of Oklahoma's purchase of the caverns. Therefore, Grass's greatest accomplishment was the development of Alabaster Caverns into an attraction that garnered the support and pride of the community and revealed to the State of Oklahoma their potential for preservation, tourism, and recreation. Grass's sale of the caverns to the State of Oklahoma placed them into a public trust that allowed visitors to continue to enjoy them while still protecting the fragile environment of the caves from future private exploitation.

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[96] "Alabaster Caverns Attracting Tourists," *The Oklahoman*, September 7, 1947, 51.

[97] "Alabaster Caverns Video Script," n.p.; Caywood, "Alabaster Caverns State Park History," n.p.

[98] "Alabaster Caverns Video Script," n.p;

[99] James, "Englishman Shaped the Lore of Alabaster Caverns," *The Oklahoman*, n.p.

CHAPTER III

ALABASTER CAVERNS STATE PARK

Isolated in northwestern Oklahoma where there were few paved highways and even fewer amenities to entice tourists, Alabaster Caverns provided a rugged hike over trails carved into the walls of Cedar Canyon and through the big cave itself. During the early 1950s, there were not any lodges or swimming pools to beckon visitors to the caverns, only the thrill of outdoor recreation and spelunking. To some residents of Freedom, Mooreland, Waynoka, and other nearby towns, the semi-precious stone of Alabaster Caverns was a jewel that just needed the right setting to show it off to its best advantage. That setting was the creation of Alabaster Caverns State Park and all the improvements, publicity, and new roads that would come with state stewardship.

When Alabaster Caverns became Oklahoma's twelfth state park, the Oklahoma Division of State Parks was less than twenty years old, having only been organized in 1935. Oklahoma joined the state park movement in 1931, fourteen years after the creation of the National Park Service and only ten years after National Park Service Director Stephen Mather called for the first National Conference on Parks in 1921. Two hundred people representing twenty-eight states attended the conference and only nineteen of those states reported having state parks, with seven having just one area

designated as state park land.[1] There had been isolated instances of park building during the nineteenth century, such as when Congress set aside Yosemite as a national park in 1864 only to turn it over to California in 1866 as a state park. Forty years later that state returned Yosemite back to federal hands.[2] The state park movement did not gain any real cohesion until after the 1921 conference. During the early twentieth century, the state park movement was just beginning to emerge according to Ney C. Landrum in *The State Park Movement in America.* He states that it was not long after the first conference that "exciting things began to happen."[3] Only nineteen states had state parks at the time of the conference. Two hundred people representing twenty-eight states attended the conference with a third of those represented states having no land designated as state parks.[4] The conference included discussions of parks management and suggested that states should form agencies to manage the parks and include fish and wildlife agencies to form one agency focused on conservation.[5] By 1940, forty-five states had designated state parks, with forty of these states having identifiable state park agencies.[6]

The key to the success of state parks has been the ability of people in the United States to travel for leisure. The automobile democratized tourism, making vacation travel accessible to the middle and working classes in a way it had never been before. The increase of automobile travel during the first half of the twentieth century was integral in

[1] Maria N. Kluemper, "Oklahoma Residents' Perceptions of State Parks" (master's thesis, Oklahoma State University, July 2005), 38.

[2] Ibid, 38.

[3] Landrum, *The State Park Movement: A Critical Review*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), xii.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Kluemper, "Oklahoma Residents' Perceptions of State Parks," 38.

[6] Ibid, 39.

the growing interest in tourism.[7] With cross-continental transportation spreading through the railroad, the building of roads and highways, and the accessibility of automobiles to the average citizen, tourism was no longer the sole prerogative of the rich.

Without interest in tourism and travel to overnight destinations such as state parks, there was little economic viability to the movement. According to Landrum, for some, economic potential served as a more persuasive factor in park development than preservation alone.[8] However, Landrum also argues, that there were "just as many equally motivated individuals who looked to state parks as a means of saving the best of their states' scenery and cultural heritage."[9] Landrum continues, "Both of these incentives, the *economic* and the *preservation*, contributed mightily to the growing momentum for state park development, and they were soon joined by still a third of equal importance: the need to provide wholesome and healthful outdoor *recreational* opportunities for a rapidly growing population."[10] In 1938, the Division of State Parks reported to the Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board that "the Division of State Parks is exerting every possible energy and means to . . . create places where the idle time of Oklahoma citizens can be spent in pursuits which will tend to build up the moral, physical and mental fiber of the people."[11]

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[7] Landrum, *The State Park Movement: A Critical Review*, xii.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid (emphasis in original).

[11] Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board, "First Annual Report of the Division of State Parks," (State of Oklahoma: June 30, 1938), 2.

The state park movement never experienced national unity or consistency because it developed, differently in each state, but participation in President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs, the National Park Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps strongly influenced the growth and development of park systems across the nation.[12] In Oklahoma, the economic devastation of the Great Depression combined with a severe drought to create the worst unemployment on record, as well as destruction of farm lands. Because of these conditions, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) played an important role in putting the unemployed to work, building infrastructure, and creating recreational outlets that improved the quality of life. The CCC set up military style camps throughout the state and built bridges, roads, parks, lakes, and ponds. The CCC worked on erosion control programs, planted trees, and grasses and fought forest fires.[13] In the decade after opening the first Oklahoma state park, the State of Oklahoma further benefited from New Deal influence when the CCC transferred ownership of the initial six parks to the State of Oklahoma.[14] Today, the influence and evidence of the CCC and National Parks Service is still visible in the parks and projects they were involved with, including the native stone structures found at the first Oklahoma state parks.

Once the state park movement reached Oklahoma, it flourished during the remainder of the twentieth century as the state acquired more parks, went through periodic reorganization, and finally leveled off to the thirty-five state parks that exist today under the management of the Tourism and Recreation Department. The state park

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[12] Landrum, *The State Park Movement: A Critical Review*, xiii.

[13] Kluemper, "Oklahoma Residents' Perceptions of State Parks," 42.

[14] Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board, "First Annual Report of the Division of State Parks," 2; Kleumper, "Oklahoma Residents' Perceptions of State Parks," 42.

system began in Oklahoma in 1931, when the State Legislature appropriated $90,000 to buy ten thousand acres of land in Carter and Love counties in the southern part of the state for the first Oklahoma state park.[15] In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps, with guidance from the National Parks Service, began four years of construction on a dam to form Lake Murray. The National Park Service directed the planning and construction of recreational facilities and structures in the Lake Murray State Park.[16] In 1937, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) transferred ownership of its work areas to the state government. With the addition of the properties of Roman Nose, Beavers Bend, Robbers Cave, Boiling Springs, Osage Hills, and Quartz Mountain to the care of the State of Oklahoma, the core of the state park system emerged.[17]

Although the Oklahoma Legislature established the first state park in 1931, there was no management system in place until the State of Oklahoma established the Oklahoma Division of State Parks on March 1, 1935 as part of the State Game and Fish Department. [18] On April 15, 1937, State Parks became a Division of the Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board.[19] The sixteenth Oklahoma Legislature and Governor E. W. Marland created the Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board, and gave it the

[15] "The History of Oklahoma's State Parks," Oklahoma Planning and Conservation, Tourism and Recreation Department, n.d., n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[16] Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board, "First Annual Report of the Division of State Parks" (State of Oklahoma: June 30, 1938), 42.

[17] "The History of Oklahoma's State Parks," Oklahoma Planning and Conservation, Tourism and Recreation Department, n.d., n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[18] Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board, "First Annual Report of the Division of State Parks" (State of Oklahoma: June 30, 1938), iv.

[19] Ibid.

authority to supervise, manage, improve, and acquire new properties for recreational purposes.[20]

Under the direction of the Planning and Resources Board, the Division of State Parks laid out a specific plan of what the purpose of state parks should be and how they would administer them. In 1938, the Oklahoma State Parks Division was composed of state parks and state monuments, with the designation that "a State Park is primarily a place of recreation. A State Memorial or Monument is a place of retrospection and meditation."[21] The Division of State Parks outlined the difference between a state park and an overnight camping ground stating that "Our Park sites have been selected with one objective in view, and are planned to provide a State Park of sufficient size, and improved with adequate facilities for certain types of recreation in addition to the preservation of natural beauty."[22] The Division of State Parks stated the department's intent for Oklahoma state parks were:

> First. A meeting place with ideal conditions for all people.
> Second. A recreational place.
> Third. An educational place.
> Fourth. A health center.
> Fifth. A week-end resort for all so that they might have a change of scenery, climate, environment and association.
> Sixth. A sanctuary for wildlife so that we may be helpful in the production, restoration, rehabilitation and propagation of all species of wildlife indigenous to Oklahoma.[23]

[20] "The History of Oklahoma's State Parks," Oklahoma Planning and Conservation, Tourism and Recreation Department, n.d., n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[21] Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board, "First Annual Report of the Division of State Parks" (State of Oklahoma: June 30, 1938), 1.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid, 1-2

Taking as its slogan "A State Park Wherever Nature Smiles," the Division of State Parks declared its intent to develop wayside parks and roadside turnouts "as well as marking historical, geological, and archaeological places of interest [all] over the State."[24]

Although the Division of State Parks and the Planning and Resources Board managed the state parks in 1938, the National Park Service continued its control of state park development in Oklahoma. Through Emergency Conservation Work funds, the National Park Service furnished the technical force, prepared work plans, supervised construction, and provided money for supplies, materials, tools, and equipment.[25] Because of these resources, Oklahoma benefited from the planning expertise provided by the Third Regional Office of the National Park Service, which employed professionals with technical training in all phases of park development including geology, forestry, wildlife management, engineering, and landscape architecture.[26] The State Legislature appropriated $36,000 to match funds furnished by the National Park Service to assist in building better buildings than previously available through Emergency Conservation Work funds alone. Because of this cooperation, the Division of State Parks anticipated that "the Federal Government . . . will turn over to the State of Oklahoma (practically without expense to the State) a state parks system that under ordinary circumstances would not have been created within our generation."[27]

In the following two decades, the Planning and Resources Board, along with the state legislature, reorganized the Board's various divisions, as its responsibilities grew

[24] Ibid, 3.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid, 4.

[27] Ibid.

and the Board acquired more land.[28] In January 1949, the Planning and Resources Board reported to the Governor and 22nd Legislature on its progress during the previous two years, stating that the state parks had 1,156,100 in visitors.[29] This period of growth continued during the 1950s and 1960s with the addition of thirty new parks.[30] It was during this time of growth that Alabaster Caverns joined the Oklahoma state parks system.

In 1953, the Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board purchased Alabaster Caverns to become the state's twelfth state park.[31] The following year, the state legislature allotted $7.2 million of general revenue to Oklahoma state parks. The Planning and Resources Board used these funds to develop and improve thirteen state parks: Alabaster Caverns, Beavers Bend, Boiling Springs, Greenleaf, Lake Murray, Osage Hills, Quartz Mountain, Robbers Cave, Roman Nose, Sequoyah, Lake Tenkiller, Lake Texhoma, and Lake Wister. By 1955, there were twenty state parks and visitation rose to 7,033,974.[32]

In late 1952, when Charles Grass's health began to fail, local and regional leaders began to lobby for the State of Oklahoma to purchase Alabaster Caverns and the

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[28] "The History of Oklahoma's State Parks," Oklahoma Planning and Conservation, Tourism and Recreation Department, n.d., n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[29] "Progress in Industrial Development Publicity and Information, Water Resources, Recreation and State Parks, Forestry," A Report to the Governor and the 22nd State Legislature of the State of Oklahoma by the Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board, January 1, 1949.

[30] "The History of Oklahoma's State Parks," Oklahoma Planning and Conservation, Tourism and Recreation Department, n.d., n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[31] Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board, "Alabaster Caves Bought, Newest State Park," *Resourceful Oklahoma* 4, (November 1953), 2.

[32] "The History of Oklahoma's State Parks," Oklahoma Planning and Conservation, Tourism and Recreation Department, n.d., n.p. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

surrounding two hundred acres.[33] The movement gained supporters from Woodward and Woods counties. On January 5, 1953, Claude E. Seaman, the Republican Senator from Waynoka wrote to Freedom businessman C. A. Lile about the issue. He asked Lile to serve as chairman of a committee to represent the community as well as appoint two more businessmen or prominent citizens to serve.[34] Senator Seaman asked the committee to present an argument to the governor and the Planning and Resources Board regarding the importance and "necessity" purchasing of the caverns.[35] In another letter the following month, Senator Seaman wrote to Lile stating, "we must push the matter to the very limit, getting all the support we can from every possible source."[36] Lile had formed the Alabaster Caverns Committee along with Freedom citizens Simpson Walker and John Hinton. Senator Seaman requested that Lile include Freedom Chamber of Commerce President Wilford McCannon and another Freedom resident H. H. Reynolds. Senator Seaman stated, "they too are men of vision and can do a lot of good getting this bill advanced."[37] He explained that getting Alabaster Caverns recognized as a state park would benefit northwest Oklahoma in many ways, including improving the road between Freedom and Mooreland, and bringing additional revenue to the region. With Alabaster Caverns under the jurisdiction of the Planning and Resources Board, the State of Oklahoma would advertise the caverns better, just like other state projects. Senator

[33] "Alabaster Caverns Video Script." Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[34] Senator Claude E. Seaman to C. A. Lile, Chairman Alabaster Caverns Committee at Freedom, January 5, 1953. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Senator Claude E. Seaman to C. A. Lile at Freedom, Oklahoma, February 17, 1953.

[37] Ibid.

Seaman believed that this publicity would be invaluable. He wanted the state to purchase the property quickly because Grass, "the owner of the land where the caverns are situated is getting well along in years and if the land were not sold to individuals before his demise, it might or naturally would go to his heirs after his death and thus complicate the matter."[38] Seaman focused on gaining the property and establishing a symbiotic relationship benefiting the state, Alabaster Caverns, and the northwestern region of the state.

The movement gained support in the surrounding towns as Alabaster Caverns represented a source of pride and public attraction in the isolated region of Oklahoma. In February 1953, another committee, representing the Railroad Labor League of the nearby community of Waynoka, sent a letter to Governor Johnston Murray asking that the governor assist them in bringing the purchase of the Alabaster Caverns to the attention of the "Planning and Research [sic] Board."[39] The committee wrote that the Alabaster Caverns "are of exceptional interest to all who have seen them and are becoming fairly well known. They could be turned into a wonderful attraction for our state."[40] The committee continued, "if we could be successful in purchasing these Caverns I am sure it would be a tremendous 'boost' and an outstanding highlight to our State as well as our County."[41] Their argument focused on the caverns as a tourist attraction and the implication was that it would serve as an economic benefit to the region and the state.

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[38] Ibid.

[39] J. B. Lewis, J. M. Glisan, and R. D. Fogleson, Committee of Legislative Council to Governor Johnston Murray, February 8, 1953, Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

Although the state purchased the park on September 1, 1953, Alabaster Caverns remained under Charles Grass's management for several months before the state took over its administration in March 1954.[42] The Planning and Resources Board began preparing to promote the park as soon as Governor Murray signed the bill authorizing its purchase in June.[43] By August, the state had erected "new, colorful road signs pointing the direction to the Alabaster Caverns, new state park, along U.S. 64 and 281 which junction in Alva[, Oklahoma]."[44] In November 1953, admission prices were $1.20 per person.[45] In August 1954, the state highway commission announced it would soon accept bids for the relocation of a part of State Highway 50 from Mooreland to Freedom, creating an all-weather route "to within 'a stone's throw' of the park."[46] Richard Miller, *The Oklahoman* columnist, addressed the need for the hard surfaced road: "if and when SH 50 from Mooreland to Freedom is ever hard-surfaced, visitors to the Alabaster cavern will increase ten fold. Tourists now avoid that dusty road."[47] One of the goals of the community boosters who lobbied for the purchase of Alabaster Caverns were beginning to come to fruition with these scheduled road improvements.

While the State of Oklahoma's stewardship of the Alabaster Caverns has been one aimed at economic gain and tourism, it has also included conservationist practices that have continued to evolve and develop during the past fifty-nine years of state

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[42] "Alabaster Caverns Bought, Newest State Park," 2; "State to Take Over Caverns in March," *The Oklahoman*, September 25, 1953, 9.

[43] "Governor Signs 19 Bills Into Law On the Last Day," *The Oklahoman*, June 7, 1953, 45.

[44] "Caverns Signs Placed at Alva,"*Ibid*, August 11, 1953, 39.

[45] Ibid.

[46] "State Highway to be Rerouted," *Ibid*, August 20, 1954, 37.

[47] R. G. Miller, "The Smoking Room," *Ibid*, May 20, 1955, 65.

management. After the Planning and Resources Board's inception and the opening of the first seven state parks in 1937, the state legislature passed a statute protecting all state parks from vandalism or defacement, and theft or destruction of natural formations, plant life, and animal life.[48] This law was especially important at Alabaster Caverns where visitors wrote their names in sections of the cave with dates going back to May 1900. Additionally, early settlers and previous owners had mined Alabaster, taking it for carving or souvenirs. Since 1960, Alabaster Caverns tour guides have instructed visitors, "Please, stay on the path . . . at all times. DO NOT TOUCH electric wires, pick-up or mark on the rocks."[49]

The first improvements included upgrading the lighting and pathways. The state also built diversion dams around the southern openings to slow the flow of water into the cave and allow for year round tours without fear of flooding.[50] Construction projects included erecting additional picnic shelters and the small shed used for a pit toilet. In 1962, the state built a new residence for the park superintendent and in 1963 an administration building and gift shop.[51] The state constructed a new maintenance shop and restrooms in the campgrounds located in the "upper" area of the park, as well as the campgrounds in the canyon, in 1965.[52] Finally, in 1969, the state completed a swimming

[48] Oklahoma, "State Parks and Recreation Areas," *Statutes* (2001), 6: 74 – 1846.2

[49] Elzie Noblitt, "Opening Speech." Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park. (emphasis in original).

[50] Caywood, "Alabaster Caverns State Park History," n.p.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid. See Appendix E for a map of Alabaster Caverns State Park grounds.

pool and bathhouse in the canyon campgrounds.[53] Then, in November 1980, the Division of State Parks remodeled the lighting system in the cave, spending one $140,000 and taking four and half months to re-wire the cave.[54]

Visitation to Alabaster Caverns increased after becoming a state park, likely because of road improvements and better publicity for the attraction. By July 1955, the Planning and Resources Board reported that the park had experienced 22,725 visitors for the previous fiscal year.[55] In 1961, visitation was down to 14,994 but by 1967, that number grew to 25,689.[56] This slight ebb and flow of visitation numbers appears to be comparable to current visitation trends as indicated by the count of visitors since 2001.[57]

Table 1 Alabaster Caverns Visitation 2001-2012 [58]

Fiscal Year	Visitation
2001	28,666
2002	26,643
2003	27,201
2004	25,750
2005	15,217 (closed for 6 months for lighting installation)
2006	21,536
2007	19,646
2008	19,981
2009	23,606
2010	21,821
2011	22,105
2012	21,669

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] "Sooner Parks' Popularity Puts Texas in Shade," *Ibid*, July 17, 1955, 23.

[56] "State Park Attendance Sets New High of Nine Million," *Ibid*, February 5, 1962, 33; "Park Director Sees Another Record Year," *Ibid*, June 29, 1967, 49.

[57] Table 1 Visitation Numbers 2001-2012 provided by Alabaster Caverns State Park Manager Mike Caywood on March 6, 2013.

[58] Ibid.

Under state management, Alabaster Caverns has served a multi-faceted role beyond simple tourism. In 1967, the Oklahoma Civil Defense and Emergency Resources Management Act created the Oklahoma Department of Civil Emergency Management to "authorize the creation of local organizations for civil defense" and "provide for the formulation and execution of a plan of emergency resources management" in the event of natural disasters or enemy attack.[59] Because of the nature of the main cave, eighty feet below the surface with a thirty-foot thick ceiling at its deepest point, the caverns are a natural choice for shelter in the event of a nuclear blast. The Civil Defense designated the main Cavern as a nuclear fallout shelter and stored enough food and water supplies to feed the designated capacity of 3,080 people for two to three weeks. After about twelve years, the barrels began to deteriorate and in the early 1980s, and at the request of the Alabaster Caverns State Park manager the Central Oklahoma Grotto of the National Speleological Society removed the barrels from the park.[60]

The Alabaster Caverns State Park, however, has not always remained protected from use or even exploitation that has proven to be detrimental for the park, the caverns, or its inhabitants. Throughout its existence, it has been subject to careless visitors and their reckless littering. During the 1980s, the Central Oklahoma Grotto of the National Speleological Society (C.O.G.) assisted with cleanup throughout the caverns. In January 1986, the first clean-up team consisting of C.O.G. cavers from Oklahoma and Kansas picked up trash throughout the main cavern including disposable camera flash bulbs,

[59] Oklahoma, "Oklahoma Civil Defense and Emergency Resources Management Act," *Statutes* (2001), 5: 63 – 683.1, 683.2, 683.3.

[60] Bruce Baker, "Alabaster Caverns State Park Oklahoma," *NSS News* 46, (April 1988), 86.

insulators, construction materials, paper, cans, bottles, and other litter along the visitor's trail. This clean-up crew also began cleaning up lumber that they found out of sight of the visitor's trail. One of the workers that day, Bruce Baker, noted that the lumber appeared to have been in the cave for a long time.[61] By the end of the workday, the workers cleared half of the cave. The C.O.G. returned for two days in April to remove litter from the second half of the cave. In July, the C.O.G. made a third trip to begin the task of eradicating algae caused by the lighting and the cave's natural moisture from the walls in the "White Way" area. Finally, in September, twelve members of the C.O.G. returned to finish the task.[62] The C.O.G. used a cleaning formula consisting of one-third gallon of bleach to two gallons of water.[63]

In October 1987, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department instituted an annual Halloween tour at Alabaster Caverns.[64] The first year, staff and volunteers darkened the caverns and transformed the main cave with Halloween decorations. Volunteers served as “Ghosts and Goblins,” roaming the Cavern during the spook-filled tours from October 23 to October 31. Tourism officials expected more than five thousand visitors during the nine days and during the eight years that Alabaster Caverns held the Halloween tours, the record number of visitors was fifty-three hundred in one consecutive four day period.[65]

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid, 87.

[64] “Alabaster Caverns Tour to Spook Visitors,” *The Oklahoman*, October 18, 1987.

[65] Caywood, “Alabaster Caverns State Park History,” n.p.

Despite the potential profitability of the Halloween tours, in 1992, state officials shortened the event from two weekends to one to limit the detrimental effect on the bats' hibernating patterns. "Biologists have raised concerns that the [strobe] lights and noise used during the Halloween tours could be disruptive to the cavern's 4,000 bat tenants."[66] State tourism officials studied the situation and after two more years of tours, letters from biologists, and a departmental study concluding that the Halloween tour was detrimental to the safety of volunteers, participants, bats, and the caverns, officials canceled these tours.[67]

The Division of Planning and Development evaluated the impact of the event at Alabaster Caverns and stated, "This event has been the subject of concern almost since its inception."[68] The report described the nature of the bat population, explaining that the Halloween tours took place at the beginning of the bats' hibernation period. The combination of human noise, recorded music and screams on tape players, strobe lights, and fog machines served to disturb bats during their hibernation forcing them to use valuable reserves of energy in the form of stored fat. Because of these disturbances, the bats woke from hibernation and did not have as much fat stored within their bodies to see

[66] Michael McNutt, "Halloween Tour of Cavern Shortened to Protect Bats." *The Oklahoman,* October 3, 1992.

[67] William Cair, Professor of Biology, University of Central Oklahoma to Khris Marek, Director of Planning and Development Div., Department of Tourism and Rec., April 11, 1995; Dennis E. to Jim Thomas, Director, State of Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, July 21, 1992. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park; Bill Runnoe, Programs Admin, to David Davies, Deputy Director, State of Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, August 10, 1992, Memo. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.; Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, The Division of Planning and Development, "Evaluation of the 'Tour of Terror' Halloween Event at Alabaster Caverns State Park," Report. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[68] The Division of Planning and Development, "Evaluation of the 'Tour of Terror' Halloween Event at Alabaster Caverns State Park," Report. Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

them through the winter months and into April when they usually begin awaking from hibernation. Furthermore, staff found damaged cave formations and lighting after each tour. Added to the ecological and conservation factors, the Division of Planning and Development determined that the safety and liability issues from thirteen reported injuries within five years of the tour were another incentive to end the tours.[69]

Alabaster Caverns also did not have adequate facilities, staff, or volunteers to carry out the popular event. The park had less than fifty parking spaces and Halloween tours attracted between two hundred and three hundred cars to the property. Tour shifts were twelve hours long, and on the Saturday of the event in 1994, fifteen hundred people attended. In addition to the five Alabaster Caverns staff members, and the visiting staff members and park rangers from nearby state parks, operating the tour required thirty volunteers per shift for six shifts during the four days of the event. The nearby town of Freedom only had a population of 264 people to draw upon for volunteers.[70] The report concluded that the revenue gained from the event was not sufficient to justify the costs in injuries, liability, damages, and staff and volunteer exhaustion as well as the detriment to the cavern and bat population.[71]

Since the first Euro-American settlers arrived in northwestern Oklahoma in the 1893 land run opening the Cherokee Outlet, the relationship of the local community with Alabaster Caverns has been important to its use and conservation as well as its growth as

[69] The Division of Planning and Development, "Evaluation of the 'Tour of Terror' Halloween Event at Alabaster Caverns State Park," Report, Alabaster Caverns State Park History File, Alabaster Caverns State Park.

[70] Research did not reveal any negative outcry from local residents over the cancellation.

[71] The Division of Planning and Development, "Evaluation of the 'Tour of Terror' Halloween Event at Alabaster Caverns State Park."

a recreation and tourist attraction. Today, local community organizations continue to be a fundamental part of the state park. One example of this relationship includes the local Boy Scout Venture Crew chartered in 1993. The purpose of this crew is to provide the caverns with an emergency response team in the event of an accident.[72] The crew includes adult advisors as well as male and female youths aged fourteen to twenty-one.[73] The Boy Scout Venture Crew also assists with projects including trail work in Cedar Canyon, improvements in the campgrounds, nature activities, and annual counts of the bat population.[74] The relationship provides the reciprocal benefit to the crew members by providing them with a community service project that fosters an appreciation and understanding of nature and outdoor recreation.

Since the State of Oklahoma halted the Halloween Tours, Alabaster Caverns State Park management continued to develop policies and programming focused on the educational interpretation and conservation of Alabaster Caverns, Cedar Canyon, and wildlife indigenous to the area. Thus, it continues to foster public appreciation for this natural wonder and its environment. In 1995, Alabaster Caverns officials added the sport of wild caving to the programming offered at the park. With proper preparation and equipment, people can explore the four other undeveloped caves on the park in teams of three or more.[75] Wild-cavers are required to obtain a permit from the park office and must have at least three people in the party with at least one person being eighteen years

[72] Caywood, "Alabaster Caverns State Park History," n.p.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, Alabaster Caverns, http://www.travelok.com/listings/view.profile/id.110 (accessed February 20, 2013).

or older. Cavers must also show that they have the required equipment including a hard hat, three light sources, a long sleeve shirt, long pants, high-topped shoes, water, and a first aid kit.[76] Explorers are also required to check in with the administration office when they leave to explore a cave and when they get back to insure that someone who can get help knows where they are. In July 2000, the park implemented a policy allowing families or groups of three to fifteen people to camp in a modified but natural cave.[77]

Educational programming focusing on wildlife includes a cooperative effort between the park and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. The Department uses Alabaster Caverns as a meeting point for bat flight viewings.[78] Another program offered is the Watchable Wildlife Weekend held in the spring focusing on flora and fauna of the area.[79] Living history programs are now a part of the Alabaster Caverns experience offered during the summers. Park staff offer lantern tours based on the tours early settlers and visitors experienced including local stories about Alabaster Caverns and Cedar Canyon. The interpretative tours feature romantic descriptions coined by Charles Grass, the man responsible for naming the Alabaster Caverns and many of the formations within the caves. Educational programming at the park also includes live animal exhibits on site as well as outreach into the classrooms.[80]

During the height of tourism season in 2004, the State of Oklahoma temporarily closed Alabaster Caverns to install new lighting that enhanced the interpretation and

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

conservation efforts in the cave. The Land and Water Conservation Fund made this possible through a grant administered by the National Park Service, and matching money from the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department.[81] Frank Florentine of the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum designed the system centered on the concept of flowing water, the origin of the creation of the cave. Florentine earlier designed the lighting system for the Kartchner Caverns State Park in Benson, Arizona.[82] Algae growth had continued to plague the cavern's walls due to the direct lighting installed in the cave's moist environment. The state commissioned the new lighting system to remedy the problem. The State of Oklahoma spent months planning and researching the project to ensure that the installation of the new lighting would not interfere with the bat population and would remain unobtrusive and environmentally friendly.[83] Staff members carefully worked to remove the invading growth without further damaging the soft gypsum, selenite, and alabaster.[84]

On December 24, 2004, shortly after reopening Alabaster Caverns a rock collapse outside the entrance stopped tours for several days. Park officials consulted a geologist who confirmed that frozen water inside the cracks of the rock overhang caused them to fall when the water expanded as it froze within the soft gypsum. The pile of rocks from the collapse was eight feet tall, ten feet deep, and sixty feet wide, effectively blocking public access to the entrance to the cave. State park officials consulted with an engineer to determine the best way to remove the rocks. Park officials considered how much

[81] Keli Clark, "Caverns' new upgrade illuminating," *The Oklahoman*, November 7, 2004, n.p.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] This was explained on a tour on October 8, 2007.

debris they must remove for public safety before taking action. Park Manager, Mike Caywood said, "since it is a natural occurrence, we'll leave as much of that as we can."[85] The decision to leave most of the fallen rock because it occurred naturally reflects a non-invasive management philosophy with regard to the naturally occurring environment. State officials decided that they must preserve the natural aspects of the cave while also considering the visitor's access to the cave. The recent collapse of the rocks is a part of the cave's geologic history and, therefore, must be preserved and interpreted.[86] This balance between the best interests and safety of human visitors and preservation values reflects the dilemma facing state and national parks throughout the United States. Their management practices must allow for the public use of the parks that by its very nature affects preservation.

Finally, the state's stewardship progressed further in the past decade. The current management has developed educational programming with curriculum involving the wildlife in Alabaster Caverns and around the park, as well as the geological history of the region and the system of caves that make up the park. Today, tour guides have de-emphasized the romanticized descriptions of the earliest tours that focused on the shapes of rocks along with anecdotal storytelling, except for the living history events designed to recreate the experience of early visitors to the cave. The tours, featuring geological and biological facts, focus on education as well as entertainment. This emphasis on educating visitors reveals an understanding that a better informed public is more likely to cooperate with efforts to conserve the caves as well as the environment they live in. All of these factors combined with an observance of the landscape, the oil rigs and tanks that have

[85] Dawn Marks, "Caverns' Entrance Blocked," *The Oklahoman,* December 30, 2004.

[86] Ibid.

been present for decades, as well as the wind turbines, which were installed in 2003, reflect the kinds of conservation changes Alabaster Caverns has experienced under the stewardship of the Oklahoma state parks system. The significance of the conservationist ethic as well as limited preservation values are further understood in the broader context of emerging environmentalism, awareness, and acknowledgement of the need for humans to take better care of the earth.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Early accounts described turn of the twentieth-century encounters with the Bat Caves as tours of adventure, exploration, and wonder. According to local legends, outlaws were the first to use Alabaster Caverns. Despite stories that have grown out of accounts of skeletons, weapons, horse tack, bison bones, and tools found in Alabaster Caverns, without the archeological evidence that might have once existed it is difficult to state with certainty that the caverns were discovered before 1900. Many of the stories of tool and bison bones found in the Encampment Room can be traced to one of the early promoters and developers of the caverns, Dr. James Schumann. It would add a great deal of mystery to the appeal of the caverns to tourists to claim early Native Americans used them. Without other corroborating evidence, Schumann's story is not credible. It was not until after 1900 that the first verifiable documented explorations of the caverns emerge as groups of people sought the caves for recreation and adventure, as well as to extract guano and alabaster for economic gain.

By 1928, proprietors began changing Alabaster Caverns to make them easier to tour by clearing pathways, carving steps, and installing lighting and handrails. Owners had found another way to exploit the caves and made changes to allow visitors easier

access. In 1939, Charles Grass bought the land and made further developments. He mined Alabaster to make souvenirs for sale in his gift shop. In the midst of his exploitation of Alabaster Caverns' resources, Grass commercialized the caverns as a tourist attraction. He advertised them throughout the state and beyond in an effort to build an appreciation for the beauty of the natural wonder and for the economic gain that increased visitation would bring. While Grass sought to protect the bats in the caverns from reckless and willful abuse, he did not preserve the caverns themselves as he continued to make changes to them, including removing alabaster to create items for sale. Although he cannot be considered a conservationist or a preservationist, he did pave the way for the protection of the caverns from further private exploitation by insuring that it became a state park, effectively placing it into the public trust.

Grass sold Alabaster Caverns to the State of Oklahoma in 1953 in an effort to protect the caverns from future private exploitation. Without Grass's work to develop the caverns as a tourist destination and his efforts to nurture visitors' appreciation for the caverns, his property might not enjoy the benefits of being protected as a state park today. Grass's development of the property, and his promotion of an appealing destination for travelers, attracted local support for efforts to garner the state's interest in the property as a state park.

Local boosters saw the Alabaster Caverns potential to provide an economic boost for the area as well as gain additional infrastructure to support increased travel. These boosters were correct in their assumptions that the caverns establishment as a state park would lead to better roads and signage to promote the park. The visitation to the park increased from under 10,000 in 1947 to over 22,000 in 1955 after the establishment of the

state park. These estimates are based on Charles Grass's reports in 1947 about the caverns' highest visitation numbers followed by a report from the Division of State Parks in 1955. Although the park saw an initial increase, the visitation numbers have remained mostly the same with slight fluctuations depending on various factors such as shutting the caverns down for lighting improvements or bad weather impeding travel in the area. One reason that Alabaster Caverns has not seen higher visitation numbers through the years is its remote location. It is not conveniently located near a major interstate, or other major tourist attractions. Visitors must plan a visit to Alabaster Caverns to go there. Its location does not facilitate its promotion as a scenic turn out or spur of the moment side trip.

Under government stewardship, the use of Alabaster Caverns has continued to evolve from utility and recreation to conservation, balanced by efforts to conserve the caverns and its natural flora and fauna, while allowing the public to access and appreciate them. An example of the utilitarian use of the caverns is the Civil Defense's designation of the main cave as a nuclear fallout shelter during the Cold War. In the 1960s and 1970s, officials stored ration supplies throughout Alabaster Caverns. While the rations are no longer stored there, it remains a fallout shelter capable of housing 3,080 people. During the late 1980s, state park officials further exploited Alabaster Caverns as a venue for thrill-seeking entertainment by creating "haunted" tours during Halloween. After seven years of the "Tour of Terror" causing damage to the delicate cave formations and the hibernating bat population, the state evaluated the costs versus the limited benefits gained from the tours and chose to halt them. The cessation of the Halloween tours in 1994 was another step in the changing conservation practices at the Alabaster Caverns.

Finally, the state's efforts to conserve the caverns have advanced further in the past decade. In 2004, the state closed the park during the height of the tourist season, to install a new lighting system intended to slow the growth of algae throughout the cave. When a collapse at the entrance overhang occurred in December 2004, limited excavation occurred in an effort to preserve the natural event of the rock fall as part of the geological history of the cave. Some might argue that the decision to preserve the natural event of the rock fall was futile considering the many changes human interaction with the caverns has caused throughout the twentieth century. However, the state's recent conservation efforts reflect an ecological sensitivity and understanding about the importance of conserving whatever is possible so that humans can continue to explore, enjoy, and learn from the caverns for as long as possible.

State Park officials efforts to conserve the caverns are tied closely to educating the public about them. The current management has developed educational programming with curriculum that includes the wildlife at Alabaster Caverns, as well as the geological history of the region and the system of caves that make up the park. The romanticized aspect of tours focused on the fanciful shapes of rocks and anecdotal story telling has been de-emphasized, except for living history events designed to recreate the experience of early visitors to the cave. The tours now focus on education, reflecting the understanding that the more visitors know about the environment and understand their own affect on its fragility the more likely they will appreciate and cooperate in efforts to alter their interaction with it in an effort to conserve it.

Visitors today witness a complicated landscape both within and outside the state park. The oil rigs and tanks, which have been present for decades, represent the old

extractive ethos that included mining guano and alabaster from the cave. The wind turbines built in 2003 highlight conservation efforts that relate to changes in the management of the caverns under the stewardship of the Oklahoma state parks system. Charles Grass represents a linking personality in his efforts to develop the caverns, first as a profit-making source of extractive resources and commercial tourism, to a preserved and ecologically sensitive attraction emphasizing the beauty and natural wonder of the caverns.

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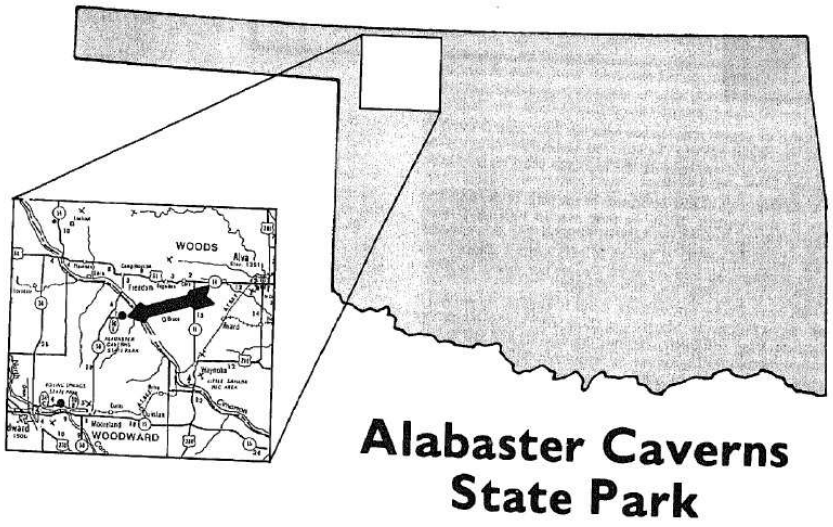
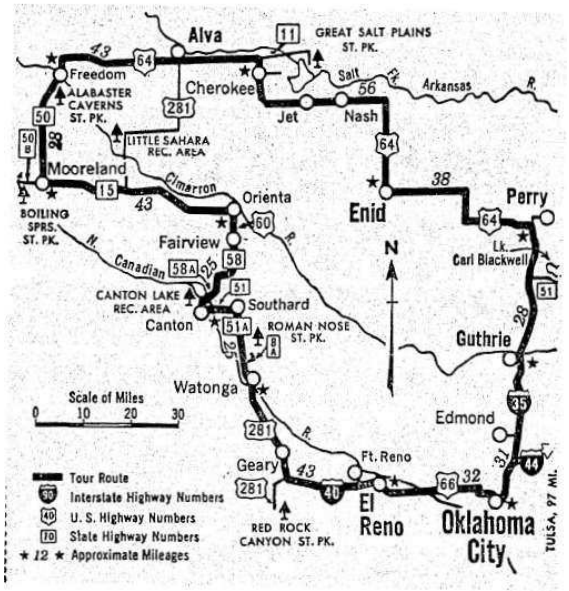
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LOCATION OF ALABASTER CAVERNS STATE PARK





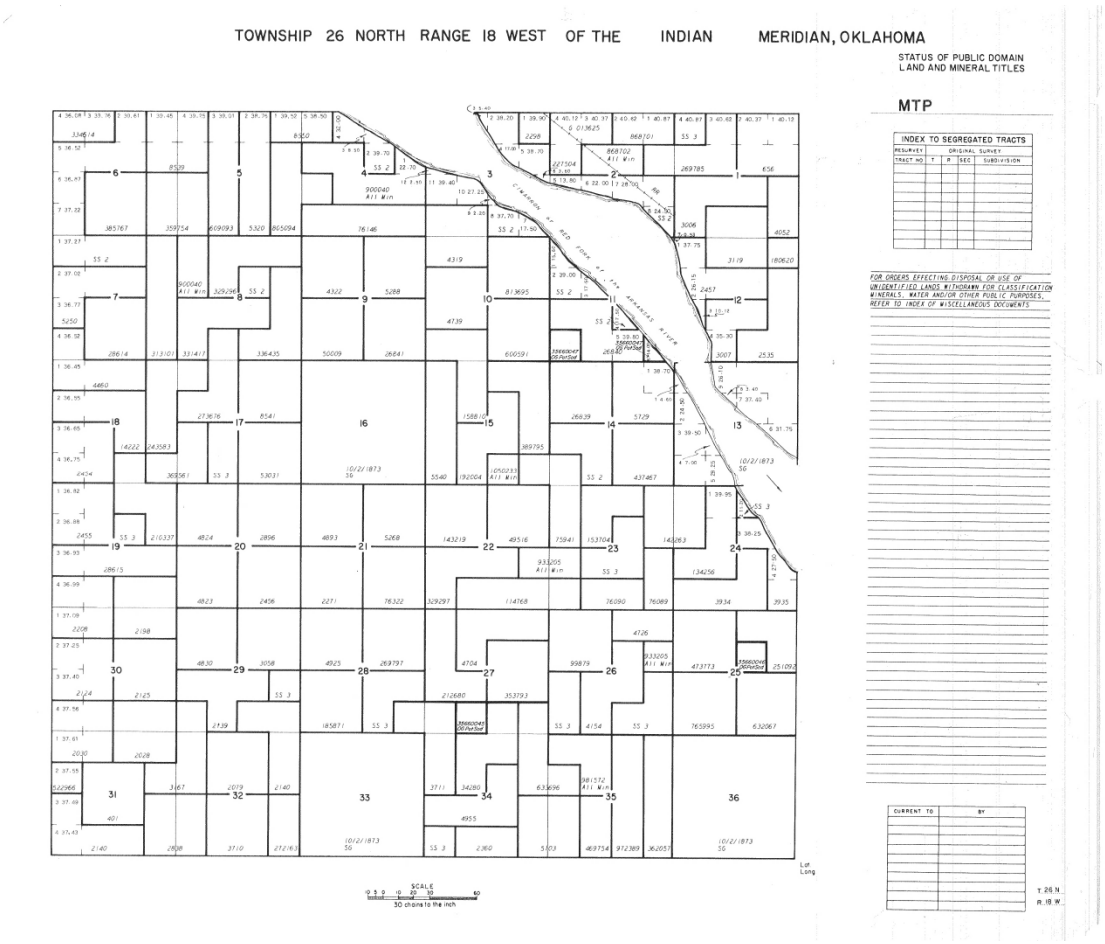
The map above shows the location of Alabaster Caverns in northwestern Oklahoma.

Bruce Baker, "Alabaster Caverns State Park, Oklahoma," *NSS News*, 46 no. 4 (April 1988), 84.

The map to the left shows the routes available to reach Alabaster Caverns State Park from Oklahoma City. It also shows several towns and cities as well as points of interest such as Roman Nose State park, Little Sahara State Park, Great Salt Plains State Park, and Boiling Springs State Park.

"With a Little Drive... You Can Really Go Places," *The Oklahoman*, April 21, 1970, 58.

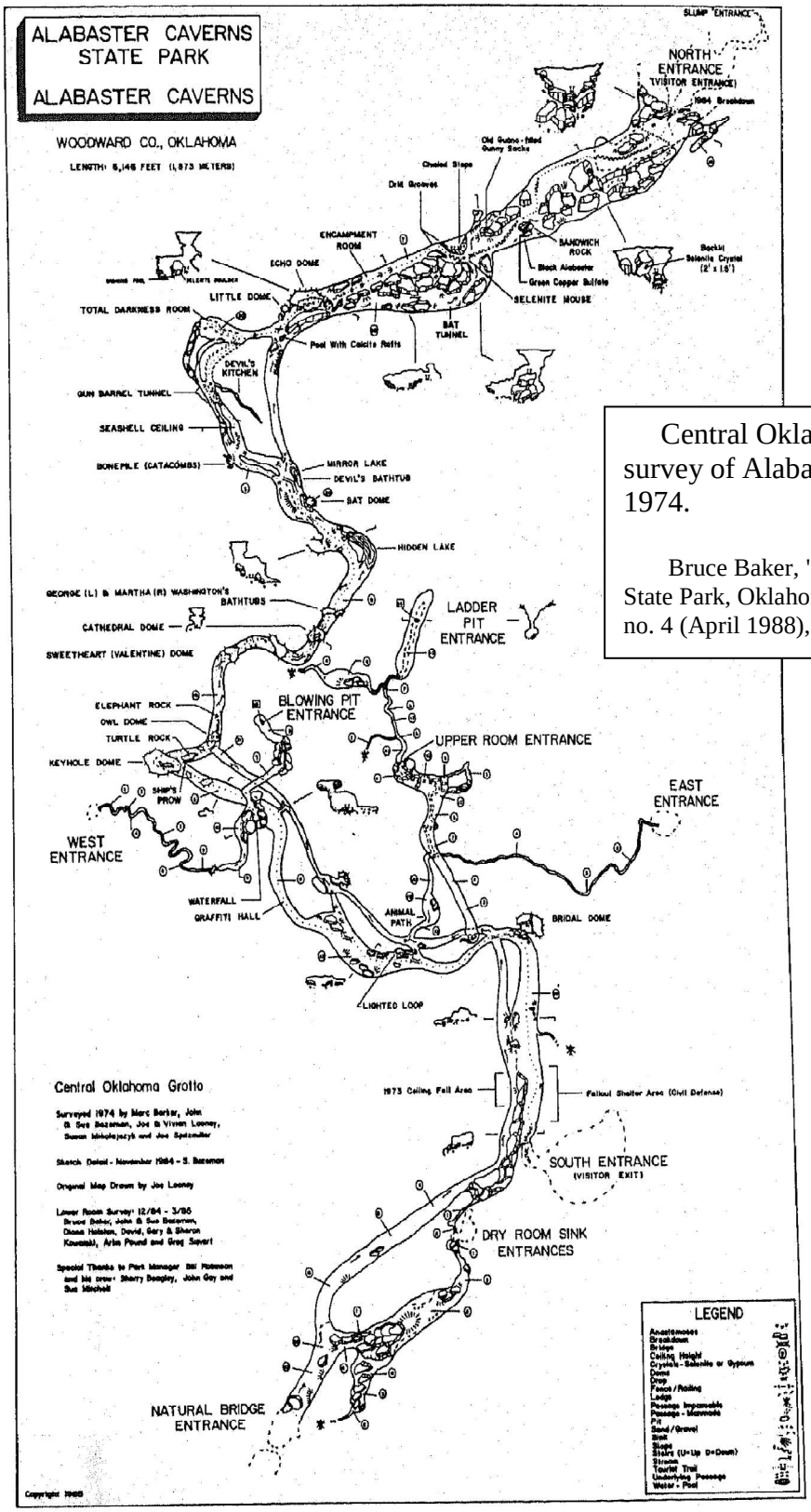
APPENDIX B: TOWNSHIP 26 NORTH RANGE 18 WEST MAP



Township 26 North Range 18 West. Alabaster Caverns is located in the southwest quarter of section 28 (one hundred sixty acre tract) and the northwest section of the northwest section of section 33 (forty acre tract), both in Township 26 North; Range 18 West.

Master Title Plat Map provided by Bureau of Land Management DM ID: 44830, Township/Range 026.0N - -18.0W Indian Meridian. http://www.glorecords.blm.gov/details/lsr/default.aspx?dm_id=44830&sid=pkdlxcqe.rhv (accessed on March 31, 2013).

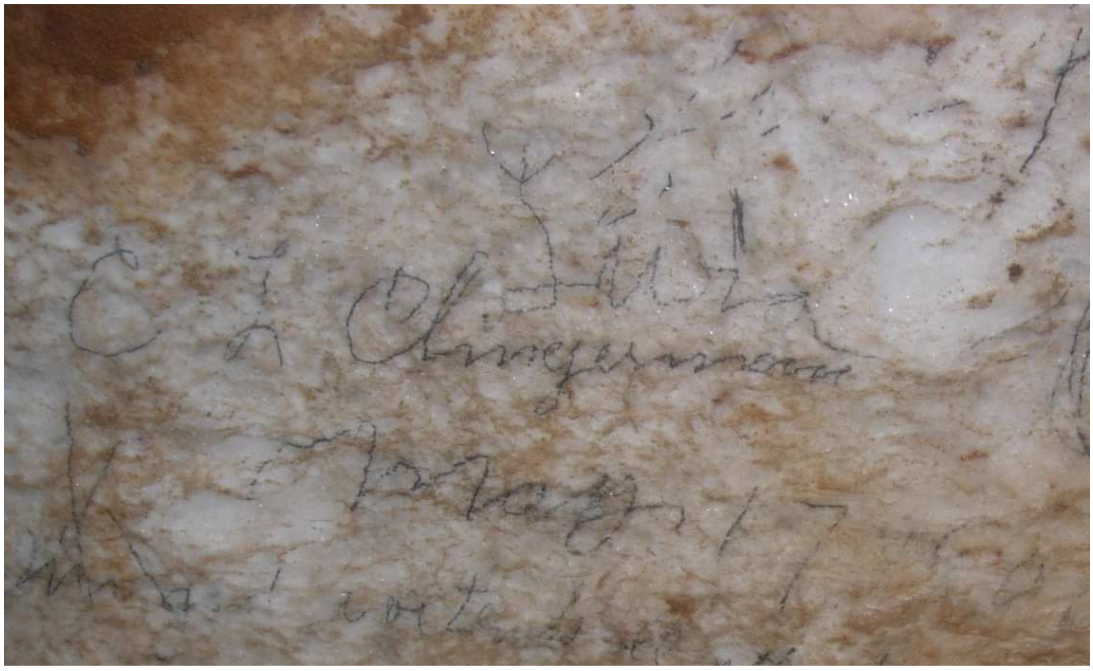
APPENDIX C: ALABASTER CAVERNS MAP



Central Oklahoma Grotto survey of Alabaster Caverns in 1974.

Bruce Baker, "Alabaster Caverns State Park, Oklahoma," *NSS News*, 46 no. 4 (April 1988), 87.

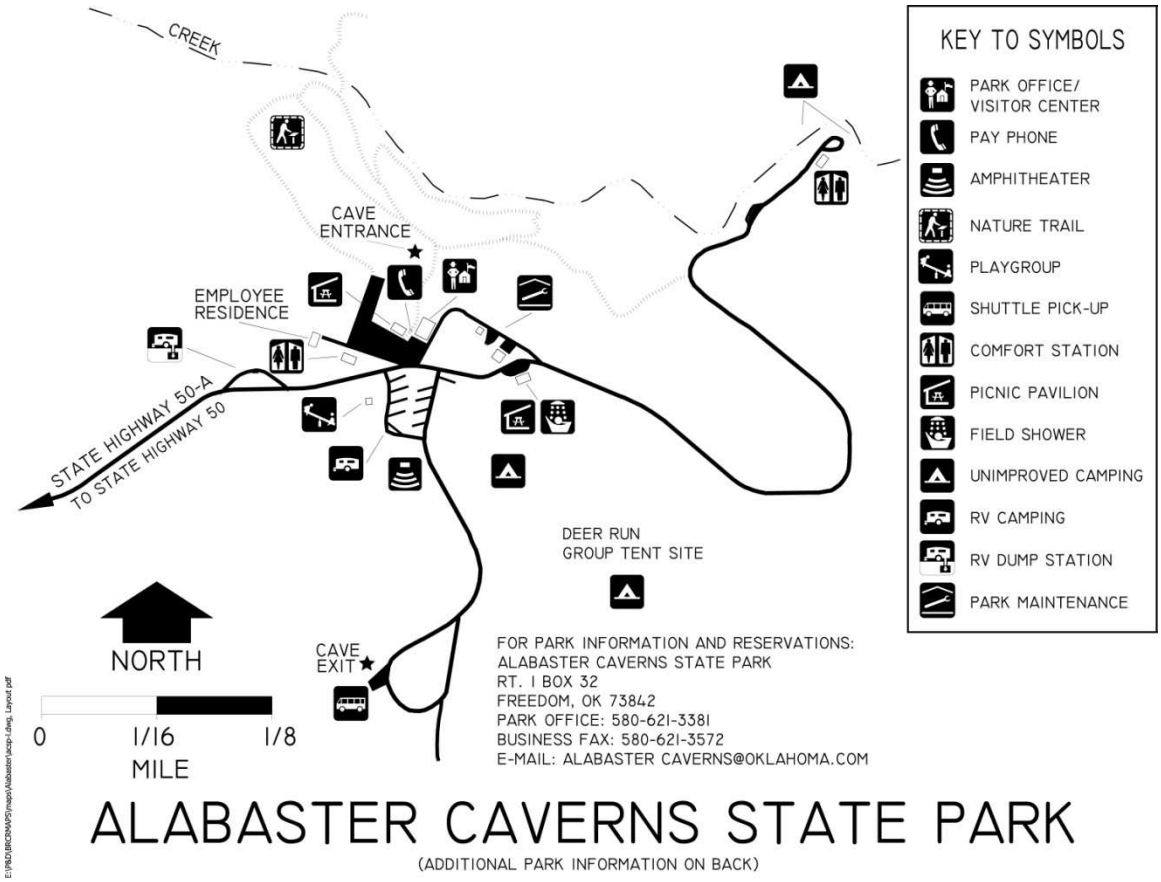
APPENDIX D: GRAFITTI HALL PHOTOGRAPHIC DETAIL



Photographs taken in Graffiti Hall in the back section of the cave where many early settlers left their mark on the walls. "Clingerman, May 17, 1900"

Photograph taken by Ammie Bryant, October 8, 2007.

APPENDIX E: MAP OF ALABASTER CAVERNS STATE PARK ABOVE GROUND



Alabaster Caverns State Park Map provided by the State of Oklahoma on its travel website. http://www.travelok.com/listings/view.profile/id.110 (accessed March 31, 2013).

VITA

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American Association of State and Local History

American Alliance of Museums